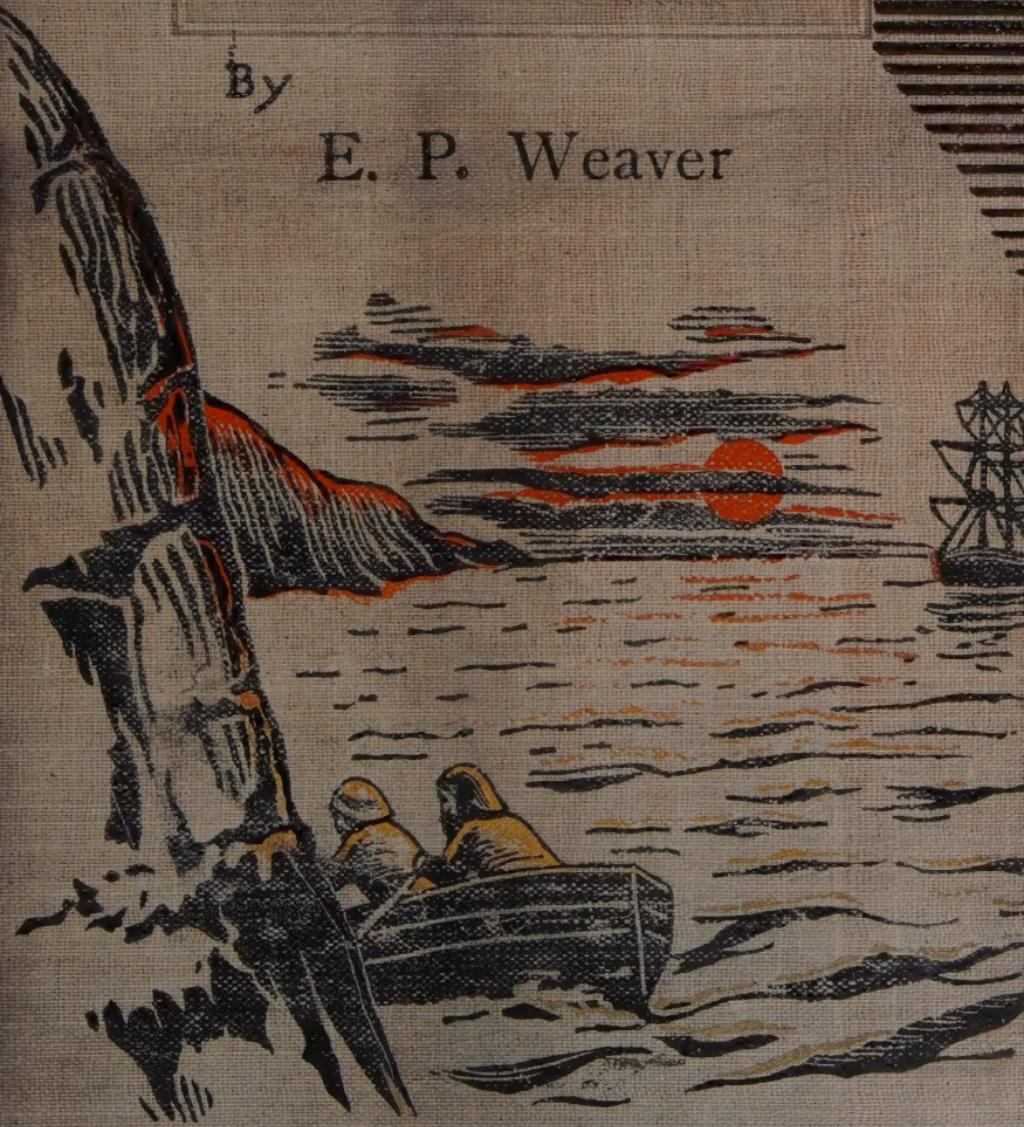


# SOLDIERS OF LIBERTY

By

E. P. Weaver



Duncain Gardens  
Methodist Sunday School,

BELFAST.

Third PRIZE

Awarded to

Jack Porter.

Jan. 23. 1914.

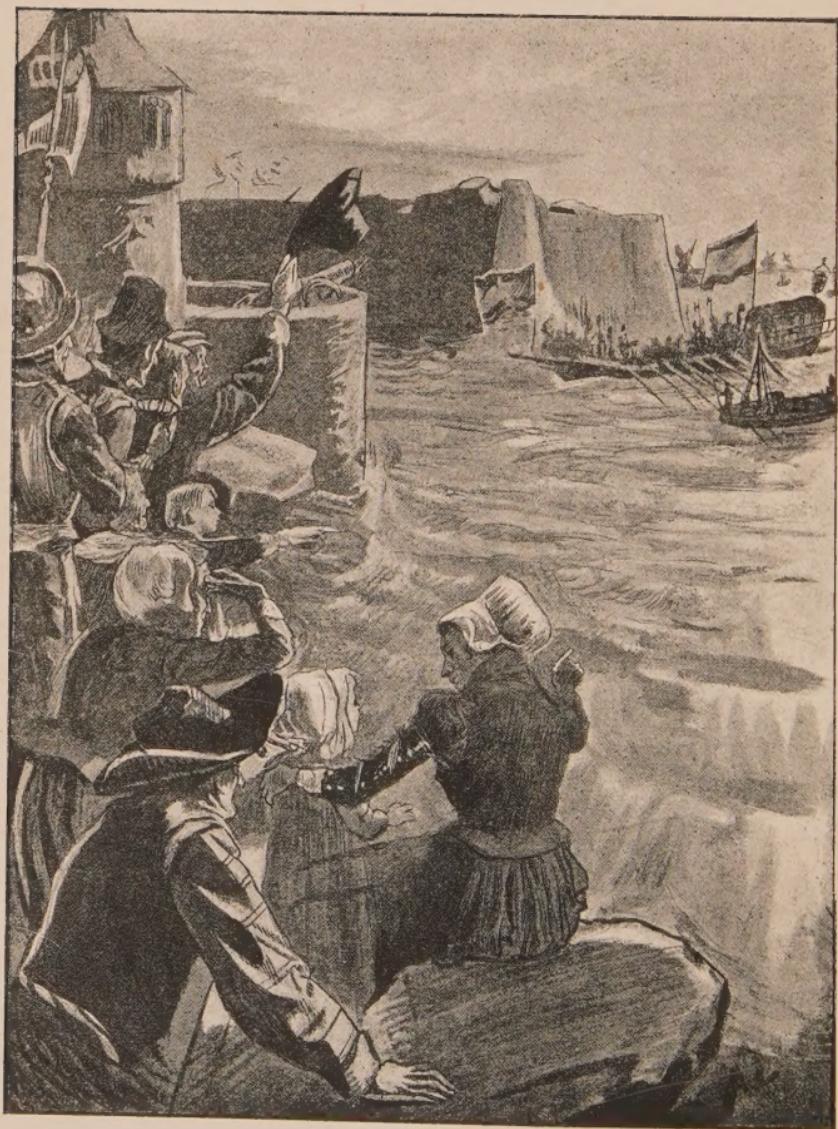
A. Bright Supt.

John Whiteside Sec.









THE ARMAMENT MADE WAY OVER THE SUNLIT WATERS (p. 138).

# SOLDIERS OF LIBERTY;

OR,

“FROM THE GREAT DEEP.”

BY

EMILY P. WEAVER,

*Author of “My Lady Nell,” “The Rabbi’s Sons,” etc.*

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE following little story needs, perhaps, no introduction, except an acknowledgment of my indebtedness to the stirring pages of Mr. Motley's "Rise of the Dutch Republic"; and to that most interesting volume I would refer any one who cares to learn more of the heroic struggle by which the Netherlanders won civil freedom and religious liberty.

E. P. W.

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# SOLDIERS OF LIBERTY.

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## CHAPTER I.

“A deafening clamour in the slippery clouds.”



AM confident that we shall win at last, Albrecht. We have the right on our side. We cannot be finally conquered. Life would not be worth living if I could think that. How can you believe that oppression is to last for ever? We are not slaves to be trampled under foot with impunity; we are men—free men and soldiers—and we will *not* submit.”

“We may be conquered, though we do not voluntarily submit.”

“Never, Albrecht!—if we are but true to ourselves. I will not believe it. What! can you think of the

slavery in which they would bind us, the mockery which they would force on us, in the name of religion, —can you think of our ruined homes, murdered friends, and dishonoured country, and still believe that Spain will have power to crush us down for ever? As there is a God above, *I* do not believe it for a moment.”

“ If it is to be, He will strengthen us to bear it, Bertrand. I know no more than that.”

“ That we shall be strengthened I do not doubt ; but, please God, it shall be to throw off the yoke of these accursed Spaniards. It maddens me to hear you talk of submission. Think of Maestricht, and Naarden, and Harlem ! I tell you, Albrecht, that if we should submit, every town, every village in the country would be condemned to suffer the same horrors. We cannot draw back ; we must fight until we conquer or die ! If we submit, it will be to the Council of Blood, the rack, and the stake. It was not our wish to take up arms (we endured much before we did so), but now it would be madness to throw them down until our freedom is secured.”

“ How can we hope to secure it, Bertrand ? The strife is unequal ; we are matched against the whole power of the greatest and richest empire that this world has ever seen, and we are not even united amongst ourselves. Our Prince is almost without money and without resources. If this last venture

fails, nothing can save either him or us ; we shall be ruined irretrievably."

"But it will not fail. Don't be so faint-hearted, Albrecht."

"We must face our position, Bertrand. It would be no help to us to delude ourselves with false hopes."

"If I had given up hope, as you have," replied Bertrand, rather impatiently, "I would thank the first Spaniard I met to put a bullet through me."

"If it were not for Marie and Hélène, I should be glad to die," said Albrecht ; "even with them, life is almost unendurable. I would to God it were His will to call us home together ! What is there left to live for ? Our country is a reeking shambles. Our homes are foul with blood. Robbery and murder, Spain and the 'Holy Office,' are turning Holland into a veritable hell on earth. Bertrand, I have cried to Heaven for help, and I am still unanswered. Nay ! my prayers are mocked—they bring back nought but greater misery. Now, Leyden (our own beloved city) is surrounded by the foe ; it is doomed to be the next victim. Soon my own home will be in ashes—my wife, my child, will be at the mercy of those who have less mercy than the lost spirits of Satan !"

"Oh, Albrecht, how could you leave her ! It was wrong to leave her alone in Leyden. What if Valdez should force his way into the city ? What if he——"

“ Bertrand, I have thought of all. Cost what it may, I have done right to come. Not even for Marie will I forget the duty I owe to my country.”

“ Forgive me, Albrecht. I ought not to have spoken so ; but it is such an awful risk, and—and—I could not help fearing that you were growing careless of your life. Heaven send you a safe journey home !”

“ I have no fear for that,” he replied, calmly ; “ I shall live until my time has come to die, and I think that that will not be yet. I wish my errand had been successful, but I can do nothing more ; and unless I get a special message from the Count, I shall start from Utrecht the day after to-morrow.”

“ Oh, Albrecht, I do hope you will get home safely ! I cannot bear to think of what may happen if you are taken.”

“ I am not afraid,” said Albrecht ; “ with care, I hope I shall pass the Spanish lines with as little difficulty as I had in coming.”

“ Nevertheless, I shall be glad when I know that you are safe in Leyden again.”

“ I wish,” replied Albrecht, thinking of his wife and child, “ that to be in Leyden *was* to be safe.”

“ Things might be much worse. We are sure to bring relief. Trust in God and Count Louis. Leyden will never be taken.”

They walked on in silence for some minutes after this, until Bertrand exclaimed, suddenly, “ Look how

the clouds are gathering, Albrecht ! I am afraid that we shall have an awful storm."

It was almost midnight, but the brothers were still pacing the silent and deserted streets. It was their last night together ; for Bertrand was to leave Utrecht before noon on the following day, and neither knew what lay before him. They were only certain that danger and difficulty were in store for both.

They were Netherlanders of good family, and were firm supporters of the Prince of Orange in his brave attempts to save his unhappy country. Like him, they had lost much in the cause of freedom, but had refused with contempt Philip's offer of pardon and reward on the condition of their return to his service.

Albrecht van Hessfeldt was now about thirty years of age ; his brother was some five or six years younger. Both were tall and dark ; Albrecht was unquestionably the handsomer of the two, but Bertrand was much more generally liked and admired. The misery of his surroundings had been too much for Albrecht ; his face was set, stern, and melancholy—no jest could move his dark eyes to laughter, no light or careless words were heard from his lips. If he had not been a good man, he would have been an utterly repellent one ; as it was, he was feared more generally than loved, for the gentler side of his nature was hidden by the intense hatred he bore to his foes, and crushed down by the weight of his despair.

Bertrand was different. An ideal soldier, he won all hearts by his impetuous courage, his frank generosity, and his careless gaiety. In his philosophy there was no place for despair.

When they left the house the sky had been clear ; but now black clouds were drifting across the blue, starlit vault above them. There was no wind in the streets, but, above, a gale was blowing, to judge by the flying clouds. Their homeward way lay for some little distance along the wall of the city ; and, as they gained the top of the steps that led up to it, both turned, with one consent, to look at the signs of the strange tempest raging overhead. But, as they gazed, the wind was stilled, and the clouds gathered themselves into dark and heavy masses, surrounding on every side a single space of blue, directly overhead. Longer and broader it grew, as the heavy clouds rolled back into banks of more than thunderous blackness. The space within took shape, until it hung, a gigantic oblong, over the whole length of the city. The stars faded out of sight, the blue grew pale, clear, and bright as the colours of a summer sunset—yet the clouds were dark as ever, and the city below was still wrapped in the hush and gloom of midnight.

The brothers stood spell-bound, with the sleeping town at their feet, waiting and watching in awestruck silence. Suddenly, the sound of trumpets burst on their astonished ears, for it was not from the silent

city, nor from the misty fields beyond the wall—no mortal lips blew those unearthly notes—their weird music called not the sons of men to war—yet warriors gathered at the call; whether they were denizens of heaven or hell, or phantoms less substantial, the watchers could not tell. They only knew that far above them in the “blue depth of ether” the semblance of an army was gathering to war. Its lances flashed in seeming sunlight, its banners waved as in a breeze. On it marched, a mighty host—footmen and horsemen, spearmen and musketeers—accompanied by trains of heavy artillery. They marched in haste, but, before they had crossed the blue, another army came slowly forward from the south-east, from what appeared to be a camp, entrenched and strongly fortified.

Another moment and they met. The shock of the encounter shook the heavens. The cannon roared, the combatants shouted as they closed. Down went horse and rider, knight and general, in the fierce hand-to-hand fight that followed. Heavy smoke obscured the view, and when it cleared the attacking force was in full retreat—the other, triumphant and victorious.

And still the brothers stood below, waiting in breathless anxiety for the end.

It came. The retreating army rallied, and advanced once more across the azure battlefield. The other

formed into a solid square and waited the attack. Faster and faster rushed the advancing host, fiercer and louder grew the shouts, but the south-eastern army waited, as silent and still as stone. Once more the heavens thrilled with the shock of the encounter —once more the battle raged, but only once. The serried square went down before the onslaught of the foe. The shouts of the victors and the groans of the vanquished mingled hideously. Then, suddenly and without warning, the combatants vanished, the sounds of the conflict died away, and on the unsullied blue not a trace of the struggle was left.

For several minutes neither Albrecht nor Bertrand uttered one word. They stood pondering in silence the fearful scene their eyes had witnessed, and gazing in awestruck wonder on the cloud-framed space above, now fair and blue and silent as the calm of a summer sea. But once again its peaceful aspect was dispelled. Across it, flowing swiftly, there appeared broad streams of *blood*—deepest and darkest where the phantom battle had raged most fiercely. Bertrand, shuddering and sickened, turned away, but Albrecht did not move. Suddenly, the crimson faded out of sight, the strange, unnatural brightness died away, the stars reappeared, and the heavy masses of cloud broke up and passed away. Nothing remained to tell of the strange vision they had seen ; and when some minutes had gone by without further apparitions, they roused themselves

and went on their way, half doubting the evidence of their senses, but still deeply impressed with vague forebodings of coming evil.

That night they said little, even to each other, of what they had seen, but morning brought strange tidings. Others besides themselves had seen the sights and heard the sounds of that dread battle in the sky ; before the grave magistrates of Utrecht they told their story, swearing to its truth, and it was entered in the records of the town, attested solemnly by five independent witnesses. So Albrecht and his brother could no longer doubt that what they thought they saw, they really had seen. Why should they doubt ? The story travelled fast ; the noble and the learned of the land agreed in giving it credence, and in attaching to it a prophetic import. Only *what* did it mean ? Who could interpret the vision ? Not *one* Daniel, but many, came forward to display their magic lore. Not one, but many, asserted that it foretold disaster to the arms of Holland and danger to her liberty. Some went further, among them Albrecht van Hessfeldt. He held that the prediction was of some final and irretrievable catastrophe, which would end, at once and for ever, the struggle with Spain.

Even Bertrand was depressed ; he realised at last that victory was uncertain, and he *feared* that defeat was imminent.

“If only we had not seen the Spanish banners and heard their war-cries, I could hope,” he said to Albrecht.

“But we *have heard* them,” he returned. “All that remains for us is to sell our lives as dearly as we can.”

“By Heaven, we will!” cried Bertrand. “If we are doomed to die, we will die like men.”

“Yes! fate has given us one little hour; let us make the most of it. Heaven but grant us vengeance, if it be but for a moment, and then let us die. I can die *now*, Bertrand.”

“I fancied that you, too, thought that the battle went against us,” said Bertrand, sadly.

“Yes, in the end; but first, don’t you remember? the victory is to be ours. They will go down before us. Think of that, Bertrand! We shall not die dishonoured, after all. We are to be avenged on Spain, and then we can die.”

But the thought of vengeance did not completely reconcile Bertrand to the fate in store for Holland. Hitherto he had not despaired of the final triumph of liberty; now he did despair, and he could not sustain himself with the fierce comfort that supported his brother. The vision had been too clear, too explicit to be disbelieved, and it was with a heavy heart that he said “Good-bye.”

Not so Albrecht. He had long anticipated the com-

plete overthrow of the Dutch armies, but the previous gleam of success was an unlooked-for mercy. In fierce elation of spirit he went on his homeward way, willing to wait and to suffer for the coming hour of triumph, and after that to die. Vengeance was all that earth had now to offer, and, thank Heaven, it was not to be entirely withheld.

So they parted, both firmly believing in the reality of that strange nocturnal strife among the clouds, and agreeing as to its interpretation ; but, to the one it came as a message of hope, to the other, as a sentence of despair.

Perhaps they erred in thinking that they saw it ? Perhaps the phantoms merely mocked the ways of men in playful sport ? Perhaps all had a meaning, and they read it wrongly ? Reader, you must form your own conclusions ; but I beg you to remember that my tale is of a time, three hundred years ago, when the thoughts of men and (for aught I know) the ways of demons ran in different grooves from those of the nineteenth century.

“ But,” some critical reader may say, “ do you actually ask us to believe in visions and omens and apparitions ? Are not credulity and superstition the attributes of the vulgar ? We cannot accept such a tissue of extravagance as you have set down for our perusal.”

I didn’t say you could, reader. All I assert is, that

the truth of the story above recorded was not doubted in the days of the Van Hessfeldts. Nay, so far was it from being doubted, that the fulfilment of the vision was anxiously looked for, and, in course of time, was universally believed to have occurred.

## CHAPTER II.

The even trench, the bristling mound,  
The legions' ordered line."



MARIE sat waiting at the window from which the heavy curtains had been drawn aside. The wandering moonbeams fell softly over her, lighting her bright hair with a saint-like radiance, and shining on the lovely face of the sleeping child in her arms. Even the cold, fair light could not add to the gentleness and purity of her appearance ; but she had never looked prettier or sweeter than on this night, as she sat listening for her husband's return, though the warm colour had faded from her cheeks, and her blue eyes were shadowed with anxiety.

Every footfall in the quiet street sounded distinctly in the quieter room, but one by one they passed the house and went on, and still Albrecht did not come. An hour and a half dragged slowly by, but Marie still watched by the window in the great, dusky, silent room alone.

Van Hessfeldt had returned safely from Utrecht, and Leyden was besieged no longer, but in all perilous enterprises he was sure to be the first ; and to-day he had left the city on a dangerous errand to a certain Count Witenhove, who, though expressing cordial sympathy with the patriotic party, was generally esteemed a somewhat unstable and wavering advocate of civil and religious liberty. Some people even suspected him of the base design of buying his sovereign's regard by treachery to his countrymen. This suspicion might do him an injustice, but certainly rendered it necessary to use extreme caution in dealing with him ; therefore the magistrates of Leyden had chosen Albrecht van Hessfeldt as their emissary, regarding him as one whose diplomatic ability and intense devotion to the "good cause" rendered him peculiarly well-fitted for the difficult and delicate task of inducing Count Witenhove to declare himself either friend or foe to Holland, for either course was preferable to hanging in the balance, between the two sides of the quarrel. Yet Holland could not afford to lose a single possible defender, for at that time she

was suffering under horrors and cruelties so vile, that one cannot but wonder that men could do so well the work of demons ; nay, not only do it, enjoy it, revel in it. Drowning or hanging, burning or torturing, nothing came amiss to the Inquisitors and their associates ; what their inhuman masters willed, they executed with cheerfulness and readiness. For many years the Netherlanders had borne this dreadful oppression quietly. As Bertrand had said, they had seen their dearest friends, their nearest relations, suffer at the stake ; they had been robbed, and dragged before illegal tribunals to answer for their words—their thoughts ! They had been governed (against their laws) by strangers who cared nothing for them ; their charters of liberty had been disregarded ; their rights as freemen trampled under foot—yet all this and much more they had borne patiently, until their last hope of redress was crushed by repeated falsehoods on the part of their king and his ministers. Then, at last, they had risen in arms to defend their homes and their religion, and in their distress, God had raised up a deliverer for them, as He did for Israel of old.

This deliverer was the Prince of Orange, who, six years before the time of my story, had begun to levy troops and to raise money for the purpose of forcing the Spaniards to leave the Netherlands. Since then, many battles had been fought, and many cities had been besieged by both parties, with varying success.

Up to this time, however, the Dutch had been more frequently conquered than conquering. The Spaniards stained their victories with the most barbarous cruelties to all who fell into their hands, often massacring men, women, and children without mercy. Thus it will be easily believed that the breach between the "rebels" and their sovereign grew wider daily, though they still professed to be willing to return to their allegiance so soon as he should redress their wrongs. They always affected to believe that Philip himself was, as he chose to be styled, "clement, benign, and debonair," and that it was only his servants who were of the opposite character. Orange even went to the length of commissioning his brother to raise an army, in the king's own name, to act against his ministers, "strictly for his good," as Mr. Motley phrases it.

A very short time had passed since Leyden was a besieged city—besieged by the hated Spaniards—and all within her walls knew the full significance of the fact. It meant, not only the usual misery and suffering that war always and inevitably carries in its train, but, if they failed to defend themselves, utter ruin and annihilation.

The siege had lasted for about six months when Count Louis of Nassau succeeded in bringing an army to the relief of the city, and the Spanish leader, leaving his position before Leyden, hastened forward

to meet him. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the adjacent country crowded into the town ; but, unhappily, the authorities of Leyden neglected to replenish their exhausted supplies ; thus the city was in the worst possible condition to stand a second siege, should the Spanish general defeat Count Louis and return to the onslaught.

Marie was still sitting by the window when her husband entered the room.

“Oh, Albrecht,” she said, “I am so glad you have come at last ! What has been the matter ?”

“Nothing, Marie, nothing. Count Witenhove has agreed to join us openly, and I believe he has been much maligned ; for though he may be vacillating, I cannot think that he is treacherous.”

“But what made you so late ?”

“I was delayed on the way home. I heard tidings at Belfeldt of the defeat of Count Louis at Mookerheyde, and I stayed to ascertain the truth. I am afraid, Marie, that there is no doubt the rumour is correct, but we shall hear more in the morning.”

“Is there no hope, Albrecht ? Who brought the news ? Did you hear anything of Bertrand ?”

“I fear, Marie, that we shall never see him again.”

“Oh, Albrecht ! Is Bertrand killed ?”

“I have no certain news ; but they say that Count Louis is dead and his whole army cut to pieces. They say that none escaped.”

“ Surely it cannot be true, Albrecht. They always make the worst of such things.”

“ It may be true, Marie,” repeated her husband, in the stern, calm voice that made many people declare him to be unfeeling. “ I fear it is.”

“ What ! you don’t believe that Bertrand is dead ? ” sobbed Marie.

“ Hush, Marie, hush ! If not dead, he must by this time be in the hands of the—Inquisitors. I hope, I trust, that he is dead. Better death a thousand times than to be taken prisoner by the Spaniards. Oh, Marie, worse might happen than that he should die a soldier’s death in battle. God grant that mine may be such a death. If he is dead, Bertrand is not to be pitied. He has escaped from the evil that is coming ; he has escaped from misery, slavery, dishonour. That is left for us who live.”

“ We are in God’s hands, Albrecht.”

Albrecht made no answer, but after a long pause said slowly, “ Marie, I never told you what happened at Utrecht. Bertrand and I saw it together. After that even he believed that we could never conquer.”

“ What was it, Albrecht ? ”

He told her all that had occurred, adding, “ You see there is no hope for us, Marie. Nothing can save us.”

But Marie had not seen the vision, and her trust was great in the justice of their cause. She believed

that there was a God in heaven ruling over all, who would not permit the final triumph of their oppressors, and she grieved for Bertrand's having died in his youth and strength while Holland still groaned under the Spanish yoke—she grieved for him that he could never now do his part towards the great work which she was convinced would yet be done. Albrecht talked in his despair of Bertrand's happiness in escaping the last miseries of Holland ere she ceased to be a nation ; but Marie pitied the young and ardent soldier that his sword could not aid the great struggle for his country's redemption.

Before morning the sad news of the terrible disaster at Mookerheyde was all over the city. Post after post brought confirmation of the dreadful tidings. The overthrow had been complete, and now the people of Leyden trembled for themselves. The return of Valdez and his army might be expected immediately, and this time there was little prospect of relief. Prince William's resources had been taxed to the utmost to provide Count Louis' army ; but if Leyden had now to depend on herself, her fate was sealed already. Crowded to excess, and ill supplied with food, she could not hold out longer than a month or two. So said some of her citizens, at least, while they did their utmost to repair their error and bring supplies into the city ; but with all their efforts the amount of food collected during the few days of

respite was almost inappreciable compared to the number of people who had gathered together within the walls.

Albrecht came to his wife on the day after the preceding conversation with a more than usually downcast expression. "Marie," he said, "I wish that I could send you and Hélène out of the city; but I cannot arrange it. I cannot find an escort for you that I can trust; besides I do not know where you would be safer than here if I could. There would be great risk in any attempt to leave the country now."

"Did you mean to send me away alone, Albrecht?" she asked.

"I cannot leave the city now," he answered; "every moment is precious. You know that I must stay."

"I know; but so must I. I cannot leave you. I will not leave you, Albrecht."

"But, Marie, you don't know what it will be."

"I have tried it, Albrecht."

"Yes, but not anything like what is coming upon us. It has been bad enough; but, oh, Marie, if you had seen as much of war as I have, you would shudder to think of what Leyden must suffer in a few weeks' time."

"Why, Albrecht?"

"There is no food in the place worth mentioning. We shall starve."

“Starve, Albrecht? Can nothing be done? Is there not time yet?”

Her husband shook his head. “We are doing all that can be done now, but at the best it will hardly make a fortnight’s difference. I tell you, Marie, we are doomed to meet the most horrible fate that ever falls to the lot of man. Nothing on earth can save us.”

“But still there is power in Heaven,” said Marie, reverently.

“I cannot think of Heaven, Marie. I have almost lost faith in God and hope in anything. We suffer and die, nay, are tortured and murdered, and who hears us or takes heed of our misery? No one in Heaven or earth. I know what you would say; I have said it to myself hundreds and hundreds of times, but I cannot believe all these things are working together for our good. I cannot, Marie.”

“Albrecht, we must not lose faith and patience.”

“At times I think I have lost both. Since that night at Utrecht I have been able to think of nothing but vengeance—vengeance! and now, oh, Marie! I am beginning to fear that I, at least, shall miss even that. What if, after all, I am to die cooped up here in Leyden, starved to death, without striking one blow? What if I am to die unavenging and unavenged at last?” His stern calm had vanished, his passion was terrible to witness.

“ I cannot bear it, Marie ! ” he cried. “ Vengeance is my right, and I will have it ; and yet, what can I do in Leyden ? I thought that it was promised me. I was willing to live for it, to suffer for it, but after all I am to die without it. It is too hard, too bitter to be borne ! ”

“ Perhaps we are to have something better than vengeance,” said Marie, gently.

“ We can have nothing better, Marie. Did I not tell you that the Netherlanders, in that strange, aerial battle, were swept away—vanquished utterly ? Earth and hell are against us, and, for aught I know, Heaven is against us, too.”

“ It cannot be, Albrecht ; if we trust in God, He will hear us.”

“ We have trusted Him, Marie, but has He listened to us ? Are we to pray for ever, unheard and unanswered ? ”

“ The answer will come at last.”

“ Starvation will come ; division amongst ourselves, perhaps treachery, and at last the fate of Harlem ; but the answer will not come. It is useless to expect it, Marie. You do not know all, I say, or you, too, would give up hope ; you, too, would be willing to barter your life, nay, your very soul, for vengeance.”

But Marie, weeping, turned away, pained and dismayed to see Albrecht in this passion of fierce resentment, and half afraid of him, for the first time in her

life. Her look, her gesture calmed him as her words had had no power to do. In a moment he was kneeling at her side, talking in a voice that was sad and despairing still, but no longer breathing savage threats of vengeance.

He began to speak once more of his plans for her safety, but was obliged to admit that none of them were feasible, and to her great satisfaction he promised at last that he would not try to send her away.

The preparations for the defence of the city went slowly forward ; provisions were collected more slowly still ; but Valdez did not yet appear before the walls. Every day, however, brought more fugitives into the city, many of whom had bitter stories to tell of the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the Spaniards. “They would rather starve in Leyden,” they declared, “than remain in the unprotected villages exposed to the brutality of the foreign soldiers.” Alas ! many and many of them did starve.

The coming of these stragglers made the prospects of the townspeople more miserable ; but they had not the heart to close their gates upon their wretched countrymen, who, among all the citizens, had no warmer friend than Albrecht van Hessfeldt. He cared for their comfort as far as might be, and listened to their sad tales of wrong and oppression with sympathy—too much sympathy, if that were possible. As he listened his dark eyes flashed, and he had need to

bite his lips to keep back the wild words that were rising on his tongue, while in his heart the hate of Spain grew deeper.

But at home he had not the same incentives to self-command, and day after day Marie was shocked and pained by violent torrents of invective, and awful threats of vengeance, in which he seemed to lose sight of all principles of justice and humanity. One day, when he had been speaking even less guardedly than usual, condemning the whole race of Spaniards as being all alike, brutal, merciless, and false, Marie interrupted him, saying gravely, “Albrecht, have you forgotten *Hernando del Rio?*”

The question silenced him at once. The name (though a Spanish one) was never without its effect. He stopped, ashamed, in the midst of the fiercest denunciations of “Spanish oppression and treachery” when that name was mentioned.

Two or three weeks had passed after the battle of Mookerheyde, when the Spanish troops reappeared, investing Leyden so closely that it was utterly impossible to introduce even the smallest supply of food. The hostile general expected the city to fall an easy prey to him, for he knew the condition of things within ; but he did not know the indomitable spirit of its defenders, nor the inexhaustible energies of William the Silent, and he soon discovered that his task was harder than he had anticipated.

## CHAPTER III.

“ Her little child has gone to sleep,  
Why should the mother watch and weep ?  
Earth’s ills were gathering round her nest,  
She crept into a Father’s breast.”



IT was very sad for Marie ; it made her cheeks thinner and paler, her eyes less bright, and her smile less frequent than before. She had seen much that was

terrible in the twenty-three years of her life, but nothing to equal the misery that came upon Leyden in that summer of 1574. Eight weeks had not yet passed since the beginning of the siege, but starvation was already staring them in the face. The burghers had bound themselves to hold the city for at least three months, and if within that time they were not relieved, they were at liberty to make the best terms that they could with the Spanish general. Two months had already gone by, but the Prince had not yet been able to redeem his promise. Valdez was making ample offers of pardon and amnesty if the citizens would open their gates, but they had no confidence in Spanish promises, and they had given their word to their Prince, so they treated the overtures of the enemy with contempt. The hope of relief was daily becoming slighter. William was doing his utmost to save the city, but it was certain that he could not bring another army to raise the siege by land. His plan, therefore, was to break down the dykes and flood the surrounding country, which would have the double advantage of annoying and endangering the Spanish troops, and, at the same time, opening the way to Leyden by water. To this desperate measure the "Estates of Holland" consented, and the Prince began immediately to collect the necessary vessels and provisions at Rotterdam, and at such other ports as remained in his hands. The cost of

levelling the huge banks of earth, raised all along the low-lying coast of Holland to resist the encroachments of the sea, was defrayed by taxes, but this burden, in addition to the damage done to crops and houses by the water, was borne cheerfully. All were willing to do their very utmost to save the courageous people who still held Leyden for the Prince and for the good cause of liberty ; but none without the walls knew what the citizens were suffering.

The weak were dying even now from insufficient nourishment, and the stronger must soon follow them if help did not come. Day by day their condition grew more terrible. The soldiers who guarded the walls had long been forbidden to go outside the shelter of the city lest it should be left altogether defenceless ; but, in spite of all precautions, their numbers diminished rapidly, and there was the fearful possibility that if the Spanish leader ordered a general attack upon the place from several points at once, the feeble garrison would be overcome with comparative ease. Valdez, however, though he had attacked the city many times, had hitherto met with little success ; and if they had been properly supplied with food, the Netherlanders would not have feared the worst that he could do. But famine was a foe not to be set at defiance, and they waited in agonising anxiety for news of coming help. Alas ! their cup of misery was not yet full ; before many days were over the awful

accompaniment of famine was upon them, and the citizens were dying by scores from pestilence.

By this time almost all the bread was consumed, and what remained was given out to the starving people in portions so small that it only seemed to provoke their appetites—not satisfy them. At the best, it could only last a few days longer, and then they must die as they had lived—defying the Spaniards to the last.

Sadly altered are the people of Leyden in two short months. There is not a face in all the dreary town that does not look haggard and old with its weight of misery and fear. Hopeless, and worse than hopeless—how can such a face look young?

Marie is worn and weary with constant watching and many sleepless nights, for poor little Hélène has grown so thin and pale and quiet that her mother does not like to leave her for a moment. The sad truth is beginning to dawn upon Marie, and she knows that all her watching, all her care, will soon be unnecessary, for death has laid his cold hand on the child. She is dying slowly, oh, so slowly, that her mother feels at times as if she will be able to welcome the sad end, and surely she is not to blame; the peace and quietness of the grave, even if that were all, would indeed be happiness compared to life in famine-and-plague-stricken Leyden. But sometimes, even yet, Marie hopes that relief may come in time to save

her darling. It is not to be, however ; Hélène and many others will be at rest before the city opens her gates to admit her friends ; and until they come, she will never open them ; never, never, to her hated foes !

Marie finds it very hard now to give the just and equal portion of food to each member of her household. This daily task is a daily temptation to her. It seems utterly useless to divide so small a loaf among so many. Oh, if she could only keep it for her husband and her child, who must so surely die unless—— ! But Marie, even bright, cheerful, hopeful Marie, cannot hope to-day ; a terrible ending to their misery seems certain, and she shudders at the thought of Harlem's brave resistance, profaned churches, and desolated homes ; and then she remembers Albrecht's despairing words, “What if Heaven also is against us ?” Perhaps he was right ; perhaps they were forsaken alike by God and man. Had they not asked earnestly for help in this their time of need—asked, as dying men pray for life, and still they remained unanswered ?

Yet, pray on, Marie ; there is One who hears and answers, even though it seems sometimes as if He has forgotten those who call upon Him. Divide the loaf, even if it be your last, and trust the Lord and Giver of life to provide the next.

Marie hesitated a moment with the bread in her hand ; then, with one glance at the faces round her—

faces nearly mad with hunger and despair—she moved to a small oaken table in the centre of the room, and began to cut the loaf into slices.

The sun was shining brightly into the room ; but, in Marie's eyes, it looked dark and dreary, for the large cupboards were empty, and so were the boxes and barrels that lay scattered about. It was shining brightly, too, upon the gaunt figures and haggard faces of those about her, but the cheerful daylight only showed their ghastliness more strongly. Such figures and such faces ! It did not matter, old or young, they were all alike, hopeless, almost stupefied, yet with a horrible look of wolfish hunger in their wild eyes and hollow cheeks. There were women there, and children ; oh ! they were the saddest sight of all, so young and yet so old, for they had passed through a lifetime of suffering in Leyden already. What would they be before the end ? As Marie looked on their faces she saw the answer written, “ Nothing but dust and ashes ! ” But now the loaf was cut, and the pieces were snatched hungrily from her hand and devoured, then and there, before her eyes. When she had given to each person in the room the morsel that was her share of the food, one slice remained, besides what she had reserved for her husband and herself.

“ Who is it that has not come down ? ” she asked of a girl who was just leaving the room. “ I am sure that I cut only the usual number of slices.”

"Kenna Boerhaave was ill last night. I think she did not come."

"What was the matter with her?"

"She was sick and faint, and could not stand. Shall I take the bread to her?"

"Thank you," said Marie ; but, as she looked at the hungry-eyed girl, she hesitated. Ought she to trust her? The temptation might be too great, she feared. "No ; I will go myself," she said. "She will expect me, and I must see what I can do for her."

An hour later Marie was sitting by the window where we first saw her, with Hélène asleep in her arms. She was gazing sadly at the child when Albrecht entered, carrying a tiny jug in his hand.

"What is it, Albrecht?" asked Marie.

"It is milk; I did not know until to-day that there were any cows left. Kalbfleisch let me have this for a ducat. I hope it may do Hélène good. Is she any better?"

"I don't know," she answered. "She has been very quiet for the last hour. I began to be frightened about her. I am glad you have come. Look at her now."

Albrecht did look, and he, too, began to think that there was much cause to fear the worst. "Poor little woman!" he said. "It scarcely looks like an ordinary sleep."

They had great difficulty in rousing her, and even

when they succeeded she would not touch the food. She scarcely seemed to know her father, and moaned so piteously that at last they gave up trying to persuade her to drink. Both saw that it was useless; the child was already dying.

Marie watched the little face intently that lay so quietly on her arm ; it looked terribly still and calm. She sat almost motionless, thinking sad thoughts of the little daughter whose short life was drawing so quickly to its close ; thinking regretfully of the merry childhood she had pictured for her, the pleasant girlhood, which was to have been so full of quiet happiness ; thinking of the little prattling voice, so soon to be hushed for ever ; the merry, ringing laugh that she would never hear again. Ah ! *regretfully* is not the word; it was rather with an intense overwhelming anguish that seemed as if it would grind her very life away ! Yet she was outwardly quiet and composed ; the time had not come when she could indulge her grief with tears.

By-and-by her thoughts wandered away to her own childhood, passed among the sunny hills of southern France. She lost all consciousness of the present and its misery. She seemed once more to hear her mother's voice soothing her with gentle words in some childish sorrow. But the sorrows of her girlhood had not all been childish, for she had lived among the persecuted Huguenots, the child of a Protestant pastor, whose life

was spent in hourly peril of the stake and the galleys. She had grown up bright and gay, however, like her sweet, true-hearted mother ; and perhaps it was her sunny cheerfulness that had attracted Albrecht, who had even then been grave and silent. Marie's thoughts were wandering strangely. They had travelled away from gloomy Leyden, away from her dying child, back to the fair mountain land in which her youth was passed, back to the bright morning when she gave her hand to Albrecht van Hessfeldt, Prince William's honoured friend and emissary. Had she not been happy then ? Who could have foreseen the misery that had come upon them, that was changing her husband's very nature ? What would the end be ? How could she live through it all ? Suppose that Albrecht, too, should leave her ? Oh ! if they could die together ! She was losing hope at last. Hélène was dying in her arms. What was there left to live for ?

The afternoon passed, hour after hour, and still Albrecht and his wife watched the little girl, thinking each moment must be her last, until it grew dark, and Van Hessfeldt was called away, leaving Marie to watch alone.

It grew yet darker, but she still occupied her favourite chair by the window. The shadows deepened in the room, but she did not move to get a light, for Hélène, whose rest had been fitful and disturbed, was

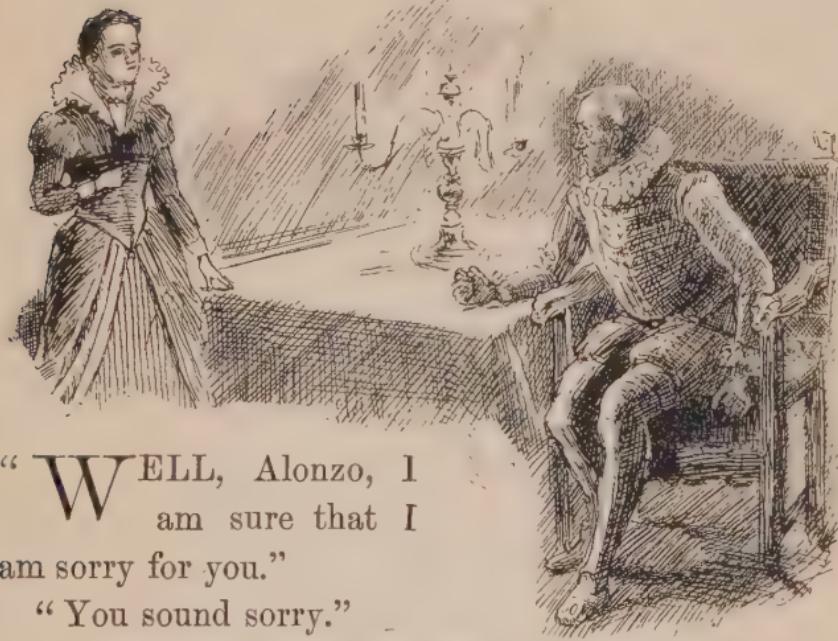
sleeping quietly now. Another hour went by, and at its close Albrecht entered the room carrying a small lamp in his hand.

“ What, Marie ! you still here ? Is she any better ? ” But Marie did not answer.

Then Albrecht bent down and looked at the little face that was so white and still. Marie looked too, and in one glance saw that she was childless. Gently and calmly little Hélène had passed away, resting in her mother’s arms so peacefully that the time was unknown when her last sleep on earth became the sleep that knows no waking.

## CHAPTER IV.

“Her eyes are stars of twilight fair,  
Like twilight’s, too, her dusky hair.”



“WELL, Alonzo, I  
am sure that I  
am sorry for you.”

“You sound sorry.”

“I really am sorry; but, after all, is it worth your while to distress yourself so much about her? There are plenty of other young ladies as pretty——”

“Pretty! Gonzalo. Do you call Anita del Rio only *pretty*? There is not a girl in Holland, or Spain either, that can compare with her for beauty. Think of her eyes, her hair, her hands! ”

“ Nay ! I will admit that, in her own style, she is beautiful ; but such haughty-featured beauties are not to my taste. That pretty little Dutch girl who passed us just now would suit me better.”

“ What ! Do you dare to compare Anita to that commonplace peasant girl ? It is absurd, Gonzalo ; perfectly absurd, I say ! ”

“ You may be right, Alonzo. What more would you have ? Do I deny that Donna Anita is handsome ? Have I said one word to her disparagement ? Besides, if I cannot see the sun, will the sun grieve for my blindness ? Is not the loss my own ? ”

“ Do you mean to laugh at me ? ” asked Alonzo angrily.

“ I mean to say that tastes always have differed, and always will, I suppose. And a blessing it is for us that they do. Would you be any the better pleased if every one thought of your liege lady as you do ? Would it comfort you if I, too, were willing to die for a smile from her ? Would you not be ready rather to try conclusions with your sword if I presumed so far ? ”

“ But you talk,” said Alonzo scornfully, “ as if her beauty were the only thing worth the thinking of.”

“ Am I more to blame in that than you ? Why do you admire her, if not for her beauty ? ”

“ I admire her, I love her, because she is so good and noble.”

Up to this point Gonzalo had spoken in a tone of light mockery that had irritated his companion ; now his manner changed, and he asked seriously, “Are you sure of that, Alonzo ? I have known her longer than you, and to me she appears to be nothing but a very headstrong, wilful girl—handsome enough, and, perhaps, clever, but nothing more. I do not think, if she married you, she would make you happy.”

“She will not marry me, and I never shall be happy.”

“Does not that prove what I have said ? does it not show her to be headstrong and wilful ? She knows that her uncle wishes her to be your wife. She is dependent on him, and she should be content to be guided by him. I do not see what more she can desire. The match is a splendid one for a penniless girl like her. However, Alonzo, it is too soon to despair ; she will, no doubt, become wiser in time.”

“I do not believe that she will change her mind. She will never marry me. The best thing that I could do would be to forget her, if it were possible.”

“I think it would,” returned his older and more prudent friend. “I should advise you to return to Spain ; you will soon forget her then. It is useless to stay on here if, as you say, she will not think of you. Why should you make yourself miserable for her sake ?”

“And yet you say you think she *may* change her

mind ! If you were right, if there were any hope of that, I would stay here till my hair was grey."

" If I were you," said Gonzalo, after a pause, " I should speak to her uncle. I *know* that he wishes her to marry you."

" What good would that do ? I know that he has already done his utmost to induce her to yield."

" I do not think that Vasco del Rio would scruple to use force if persuasion failed ; and, on my honour, I should not blame him. One cannot expect him to have patience with her caprices and whims."

" I would rather never see her again, Gonzalo, than have him force her to marry me ! "

Gonzalo shrugged his shoulders, saying lightly, " Advice is thrown away on you. For my part, I should not scruple to use the power that the fates had given me, if I were you. I should trust to her forgiveness afterwards."

On the evening of the day during which the foregoing conversation took place, Anita was sitting alone in her room, when she received a message from her uncle desiring her presence. She was surprised at this, for she rarely saw him, though they lived under the same roof ; but she obeyed his command immediately. She found him alone, about to sit down to supper, and was invited to take a seat at the table. The meal passed in silence, and as soon as it was over the servants were ordered to withdraw ; but for some

minutes Anita was not informed why her presence had been requested.

Vasco del Rio was a tall, thin-featured but handsome man of about sixty, with grey hair, and dark, cold-looking eyes. His niece was also tall, and was rather like him in feature. She was, as Alonzo had declared, more than pretty. Her hair and eyes were very dark, her complexion was pale but clear, and her figure was slight and graceful.

She sat gazing at her companion with a look that increased the likeness. The face of the girl was open and defiant ; that of the man brooding and cruel, but there was still a likeness. Both were angry, and both were preparing for a struggle.

At last Vasco spoke. "Anita," he said, "Alonzo da Sessa asked my permission to make you his wife. He has since told me that you have refused him. Is this true ?"

"Yes," she replied, briefly.

"Have you thought of what you are doing ?" he asked, evidently trying to repress his impatience. "He is rich, young, and noble ; handsome, and well thought of : what more would you have ?"

"I don't care for him, sir."

"He cares for you ; that should satisfy you, Anita. You will learn to like him well enough in time, I dare-say. Don't be nonsensical and foolish. You will never have such a chance again. The head of the

family of Da Sessa is not to be despised. If you marry him, it will be your own fault if you are not one of the greatest ladies at the court of Spain. You will have money, jewels, and fine dresses in abundance. You——”

“Sir, I cannot sell myself for these things,” interrupted Anita, scornfully ; “I have given Don Alonzo his answer.”

“But I wish you to reconsider it.”

“I cannot, sir.”

“You mean you will not,” he retorted angrily. He was an ambitious man, and it was in the power of Da Sessa to assist him in his schemes ; but if his beautiful niece was obstinate in her refusal, he could not expect Alonzo to further his interests. Cost what it might, she must give way. The alliance was necessary to him, and he did not intend to allow his plans to be thwarted by this girl.

“Anita,” he continued, “you must understand that this matter is settled. I distinctly command you to accept Don Alonzo da Sessa, and I will permit no further trifling !”

“And I distinctly say that I will not accept him !” replied Anita.

“You cannot help yourself ; you must obey me. It is absurd for you to take that tone to *me*, on whom you are entirely dependent.”

“If I am dependent on you it is your own fault,”

she answered, with flashing eyes ; “ my father had enough and to spare, they tell me. *You*, who betrayed him, have robbed me of every single real, and then you dare to tell me that I am dependent on you ! ”

This outburst startled Del Rio. “ You don’t understand,” he muttered : “ I did nothing but my duty.”

Anita rose to leave the room, saying, “ I understand too well. I know now *all* that I owe to you.”

By this time he had recovered himself. “ Listen to me a moment ! ” he exclaimed ; “ it will be as well that you should understand your position. If you again refuse the hand of Señor da Sessa, you shall leave this house for ever.”

“ I would rather be a beggar in the streets than Señor da Sessa’s wife,” she answered quickly.

Her uncle looked at her steadily, and, dropping his voice, said slowly, “ If you do leave this house it shall be for the prison of the Inquisition.”

Anita turned pale. “ You cannot, you dare not be so wicked.”

“ I will not be disobeyed.”

“ And I—do you think that I would marry him from fear ? Nothing that you can do shall move me. I will never be his wife. Do your worst. I know you now for what you are.”

“ My worst ! Do you know what you are saying, girl ? You are brave enough in words ; have you courage to bear imprisonment, torture, *death* ? ”

“ You are trying to frighten me. You have no such power over me.”

“ Have I not power ? I have but to swear that you scoffed at the Virgin, or mocked at the priests, and you are lost. The words once spoken, I myself could not save you. You would disappear from the light of day for ever ; your very name would soon be forgotten. Your fate might be guessed, it would never be known.”

“ Even you would scarcely dare to be so cruel. There is a God in heaven.”

“ Anita, do not tempt your fate. I swear to you, by that same God in heaven, that I will not spare you if you disobey me. Go, now ; think over what I have said, and beware how you presume on my mercy. I tell you once more that no power on earth shall save you if you again refuse Da Sessa.”

She left him, and he flattered himself that his object was gained. He had no mercy, as he had said, but he believed that his *threats* would bring her to reason. However, as the days went on he began to doubt the success of his experiment, and tried to awaken her fears by sending a priest, Josef Losada, to visit her.

This man, in whom he had partially confided, was a member of the Council of Blood, but Del Rio had mis-calculated the character of his instrument ; the priest was a more fanatical Romanist than he had supposed. He not only discovered that Anita had doubts of some of the fundamental doctrines of “ the Church ” (a fact

which disconcerted Del Rio's plans), but he refused to see that these might be atoned for by implicit obedience to her uncle's wishes regarding her marriage. No one cared less than Vasco del Rio about the disputed points of theology which had raised such a storm throughout the length and breadth of Christendom ; to him they were all alike foolishness, and it had not occurred to him that his niece might possibly have caught the infection of the prevalent "heresies." Unhappily, Losada's investigations proved that she had—when, where, and how, it was difficult to say—and she was by no means submissive and respectful when the priest endeavoured to reclaim her to the bosom of holy "Mother Church" ; indeed she soon managed to rouse the somewhat irritable temper of the reverend father, and henceforth he was eager to treat her as contumacious, and deliver her over to the tender mercies of the Inquisition. This was by no means what her uncle had intended, but his tool had become unmanageable ; and it seemed likely that whether she consented to marry Alonzo or not she would still be sacrificed as a *heretic*.

Losada, to do him justice, laboured earnestly for her conversion. He read to her, preached to her, and prayed to all the saints in succession for her benefit, by the hour together, and was rewarded only by increased obstinacy and irreverence on the part of the object of his zeal. Yet there was compensation for

the disappointment which his ill-success afforded him. If she had returned to her duty through his exertions, his own conscience would have applauded him, but his conscience alone ; while should he have the honour of bringing so illustrious a “ criminal ” to the stake, his zeal against heresy and his indefatigable efforts to suppress it would redound to his credit wherever the name of the “ Holy Office ” was terrible. The victims were usually taken from among the lower classes, but the death of Anita del Rio would prove to all the world that neither youth, beauty, nor nobility of birth could move the guardians of the purity of religion from the enforcement of their just decrees. She was Spanish, too, and as such her execution would be of special value in showing the determination of the Inquisitors to root out heresy *wherever* it existed.

Alonzo da Sessa was much alarmed at the ill-omened interest which Josef Losada seemed to feel in Anita. One afternoon he confided his fears to his friend Gonzalo, as they were walking by the side of one of the numerous canals that intersected the neighbourhood.

It is time, perhaps, to explain that they were both young Spanish officers of good family, serving under Valdez against the “ rebellious ” citizens of Leyden. They were at present quartered at Veenendaal, a little village six or seven miles from the city, under the immediate command of Vasco del Rio, who bore a

good reputation as a soldier, except that, even among his own countrymen, he was infamous for his cruelty and rapacity.

Alonzo had been alarmed at Losada's frequent visits to Del Rio's house, and Gonzalo gave him little comfort. "I am afraid," he said, "that there is some plot on foot between Losada and Del Rio. I hope Anita will be careful to give them no opportunity of injuring her. But, poor girl, what chance has she against such a pair of villains as that? Has Del Rio said anything to you since you last spoke to her?"

"He told me that he approved of my suit, and assured me that he was confident of my ultimate success."

"Ah! then perhaps they are only trying to frighten her; but it looks bad."

"To frighten her—how?" asked Da Sessa, anxiously.

"I think they are threatening her with the Inquisition."

"The Inquisition!" exclaimed Alonzo, in a tone of horror. "How can that be? She is as true a Catholic as either you or I."

"Truer, probably," replied Gonzalo. "At least, she very easily might be a truer one than I am. The priests themselves don't believe in their own exploded fables, and how can they expect any one else to do so?"

But do you know so little of the 'Holy Office' that you think heresy has the only claim to its notice? The staunchest supporters of the Church would stand a poor chance of being spared if it happened to suit Losada and his friends to put them out of the way."

Alonzo was too excited to listen to all this. "Do they dare to say that the *Donna Anita del Rio* is affected, even in the slightest degree, with the vile Lutheran heresy?" he cried.

"I did not say that I believed it," expostulated his friend.

"You should scorn to repeat such slanders. I have borne too much from you already. *Anita* a heretic! I tell you she is as high above all possibility of such iniquity as that bit of blue sky is above these flat never-ending fields. They who told you the story are liars. They shall admit that they wronged her basely, or they shall prove their words with the sword."

"Nonsense, Alonzo. What are you talking of? You yourself asked me what I knew about her. I had not the slightest intention of being disrespectful to her. She has presumed to doubt the efficacy of the prayers of the saints, or, perhaps, she has dared to pity a heretic; either would be sufficient to condemn even a girl like her to agony and death—ay, and after death (if the monks are right) to the fierce and enduring fires of hell. But, for myself, I have no

faith in hell, and as little in the heaven they talk of ; for they tell us, on the one hand, that all is purity and happiness there, and, on the other, they ask us to believe that half, or more than half, of its inhabitants are churchmen."

"But about Anita," asked Alonzo impatiently ; "how do you know that she is in such danger?"

"I was waiting in the ante-room of Del Rio's house two days ago ; he kept me a long time, and I was getting very tired, when I heard voices in the next room. They were those of Señor del Rio and Padre Losada. I listened, Alonzo, for your sake, for I heard the name of Anita. They spoke quietly at first, but by-and-by they grew angry, and then I could hear every word. For some reason, Vasco del Rio is bent upon marrying his niece to you, and had, as far as I could discover, offered her the choice between you and the Inquisition. To give a show of reality to his threats, he appears to have asked the co-operation of Losada, who, however, has taken the matter into his own hands, and intends to treat the young lady with the severity that he pretends to imagine she deserves."

"The brute!" interrupted Alonzo. "And her uncle, will he do nothing to save her?"

"To do him justice, he said what he could, but the priest was obstinate and unreasonable. I do not think he will be satisfied until she is in the power of the Inquisition. It was settled, at last, however, that she

is to have at least a month's respite, during which time her uncle will do his utmost to bring her back to the fold. He, who believes in nothing, is to take upon himself the task which the fanatical Padre has given up as hopeless, and, from my heart, I wish him success. She is too young to die like that."

"What can be the motive of that villain? Why should he wish to hunt her to death?"

"Who can say? Zeal, or spite, perhaps."

"Spite! How can she have injured him?"

"To tell the truth, Alonzo, I think she has spoken a little too plainly. I fear she has been provoked to say what wiser people scarcely dare to think. It is no difficult matter to make a relentless foe of a man like Losada, who is full of unreasonable superstitions and overbearing fanaticism. A sharp answer, a few words of sarcasm, would be sufficient, and I doubt that Donna Anita has spared him neither."

"What can I do? How shall I save her? You speak as calmly and unconcernedly as if we were only discussing the fate of a dog or a horse!"

"I would help you if I could, but what can we do? If she is wise, she will save herself. Let her declare her conviction that the priests are right, or let her consent to marry you, and then you can save her, or at least you can try. As it is you can do nothing."

"And if she were my wife I could not save her from Losada!" cried Alonzo. "Nay, but I will!" he

continued, passionately ; “if it costs all I possess, if I have to join with William of Orange to do it, I will save her if she will trust me ! I *will* save her !”

“ You are mad, Alonzo ! Do you think that you are a match for the Inquisition, with its secret agents and the whole power of the empire at its back ? Against her will you cannot help her.”

“ I tell you, Gonzalo, I will stir up the villagers, I will rouse the soldiers, I will join heart and soul with these Netherlanders ! If it costs Philip these provinces, I *will* save her ! They shall not dare to touch a hair of her head, or they will long remember the vengeance of Alonzo da Sessa ! Every priest, every monk that falls into my hands shall bitterly rue her death. With his own life he shall pay the penalty—I will have mercy upon none of them. But she shall not die ! I will rescue her from the murderers or die with her !”

“ Hush, hush ! What good would that do to her ?”

“ I will be revenged on Josef Losada ! Ay, and on Del Rio, too !”

“ In the name of all that’s reasonable, be quiet, Alonzo ! If what we have said during this one short afternoon were overheard, neither your life nor mine would be worth the smoke of yesterday’s fire. Your imprisonment, or even your death, would not help her much. She may listen to reason, if you keep cool

enough to talk reason. It is madness to speak as you have done."

"Then what would you advise me to do?"

"Give her one more chance to alter her mind, and if she is obstinate leave her to her fate. If she marries you, Del Rio will save her if possible. If she persists in her folly, neither you nor he can do more for her. Her blood will be upon her own head."

To Gonzalo's great relief, Alonzo did not continue the conversation, for the danger of being overheard was no slight one.

Da Sessa determined to take his friend's advice, and to ask Anita once more to marry him—for her own sake, if not for his ; afterwards he would trust to his own and her uncle's influence with Philip to protect her, even if she declined to give way to Padre Losada's religious prejudices, but perhaps she might be induced to submit herself to the authority of the Church. Or, if nothing else would save her, he would take her to England, where she could safely avow her belief in the doctrines of the Reformers. Cost what it might, she should not die for her opinions if she would let him save her. He was ready to sacrifice everything, home, wealth, and position, for her sake ; surely she would not be so cruel to herself and to him as to refuse his help in spite of all.

On the following day he again presented himself at Del Rio's house, but Anita would not even see him.

He called again and again, but always with the same result, and at last he gave up the attempt as hopeless.

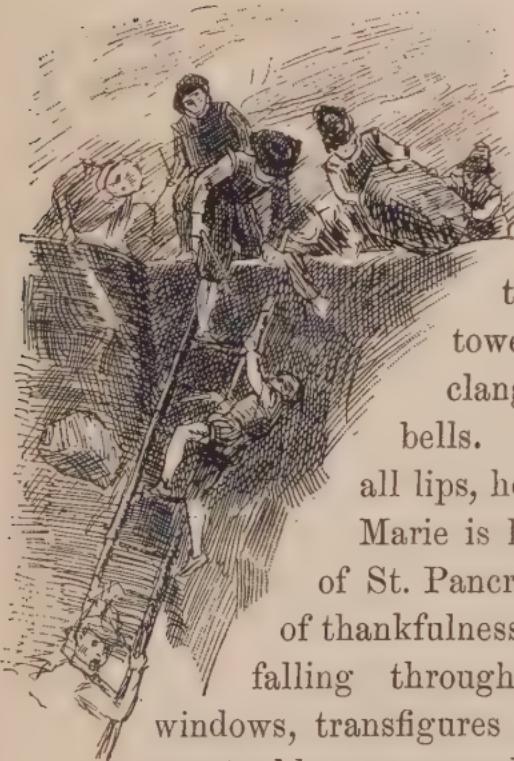
Anita regarded him as the cause of her misfortunes, and was very angry with him. The priest continued his persecutions till she was almost desperate, but she had no thought of submission. If it had been in her power she would have treated him as she had treated Alonzo, but it was not possible. Every two or three days she had to endure a visit from him, and every interview enraged him yet further against her. He hated her, and had determined that she should die as a convert to the infamous doctrines of the so-called "Reformers," and yet of those doctrines she knew little or nothing. She was doomed to suffer the martyr's death, unsupported by the martyr's faith. There was no escape for her ; Losada, unknown to Vasco del Rio, had already denounced her to the Council of Blood ; but they, unwilling to show severity, had, in consideration of her youth, directed her father confessor to make one more effort to reclaim her by gentle means before delivering her over to the "secular arm."

Losada's last attempt to induce her to recant (as he perhaps intended) had merely exasperated her, and he had left the house, shaking the dust from off his feet, after explaining to her with grim minuteness the terrors of her coming fate. Before him she had been brave and defiant even to the last, but when he

was gone the horrors of which he had spoken overwhelmed her. At the time she had scarcely believed him, but now she knew that he had spoken truth. Was it worth while to suffer so much when a few words would save her? Yet her father had died sooner than speak such words. Should she, his daughter, show herself unworthy of him? Nay, let them do their worst; her father had died for the truth, and so would she. Losada should not force her to lie, even to save her life.

## CHAPTER V.

“O blindness to the future! kindly given  
That each may fill the circle marked by Heaven.”



THERE is music in the streets of Leyden; gaily dressed people throng the market - place and gather in knots about the churches, whose towers rock to the merry clanging and pealing of the bells. There is laughter on all lips, hope in all eyes to-day.

Marie is kneeling in the Church of St. Pancras, murmuring prayers of thankfulness, while the soft light, falling through the richly coloured windows, transfigures her pale face, with its sweet blue eyes and tender mouth, into almost angelic brightness. As she kneels there the notes of an organ ring through the building, and a

rich voice begins to sing the hundred and twenty-fourth Psalm. “ If the Lord Himself had not been on our side, may Israel now say ; if the Lord Himself had not been on our side, when men rose up against us : They had swallowed us up quick, when they were so wrathfully displeased at us. . . . But praised be the Lord, who hath not given us over for a prey unto their teeth. Our soul is escaped even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler ; the snare is broken, and we are delivered. Our help standeth in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

The triumphant strain has died away, and now, after a few moments’ pause, the pathetic notes of a dirge are wailing sadly among the dim arches and pillars of the church ; for even in her joy Leyden cannot forget those who have passed away, and Marie, still on her knees, is weeping wildly. Scarcely a week has gone by since she laid her darling to rest for ever, and now—and now—Leyden keeps high festival ! Good news has come ! Relief will soon arrive. The dykes are broken down, the flood gates of Rotterdam are open ; soon the waters will reach the city, and her troubles will be over.

But it is too late. Hélène is dead, and Marie refuses to be comforted. Yet, strange to say, the soft, slow melody stealing among the aisles hushes her sorrow ; its very sadness soothes her. Unlike the other strain, it touches her grief, but touches it gently and tenderly ;

it seems to her like the sweet sympathy of some dear friend. It leads her to think of the child as she lay calm and peaceful, all suffering over, all sorrow impossible ; and from the sleeping she wanders to the waking—to the glorious waking in the land beyond the grave. Can she not give her up for that ? It is best for her. She is happy, fair, and pure for ever. On earth, had she lived, sorrow might have touched her, sin might have stained her; but in Heaven she is safe from both.

Once more the music dies, and Marie rises from her knees and goes her way.

All day bands parade the streets, all day the bells ring gaily, and outside the Spaniards wonder as they listen.

Prince William's envoy is entertained by the magnates of the town with all the honour they can show him ; and though the viands are neither rich nor delicate, he is content to take the will for the performance.

At the table he tells his story, and the grave burghers listen, breathless, to his account of the dangers he has encountered, and the hair-breadth escapes that he has had. He tells his story simply and without exaggeration, as only a brave man can. But the perils he has dared were real and terrible, and his hearers tremble as they learn what he has risked to bring them hope and the Prince's message.

It had been no easy matter even to pass through the Spanish lines unseen and unsuspected, but he had done yet more. He brought them news of a proposed attack upon the town, which was to take place during the dark and silent hour of midnight, by which Valdez hoped to render William's labours futile. Upon many points at once this attack was to be made. The hostile general was sanguine of success, for he expected to surprise his worn-out and weakened foe; but, unhappily for his plans, the Prince's disguised messenger put the burghers on their guard, and they were in perfect readiness to receive him when he came.

The envoy brought good news to all, but to Albrecht van Hessfeldt he brought a special message also, from the brother whom he had believed to be dead. It was only a few words of affection, and a *promise* to be with them soon, in his old hopeful style. Had he forgotten the vision of Utrecht? Albrecht wondered.

He questioned the messenger eagerly. "How had Bertrand escaped from Mookerheyde? Where was he now? What was he doing?"

But the man could tell him little. "It was only by chance," he said, "that he gave me this errand. I was speaking of my journey hither and he overheard. I do not know him except by name."

The streets were quiet again when Albrecht returned home. Marie was very weary, lying asleep and dreaming with a happy smile on her face. She dreamt not

of death and disease and misery, not of starvation, not of the dreadful scenes she had lately witnessed ; but of her lost child, living and merry as of old, and of Leyden, joyous and happy as when her husband brought her home a bride. Suddenly she started and awoke. Albrecht stood beside her, saying softly, "Marie ! Marie ! I would not have disturbed you if it had not been to tell good news."

"What is it, Albrecht ? Has help come already ?"

"No ; not yet. It is that Bertrand is not dead. He is with the Prince at Rotterdam."

"Oh, Albrecht ! I am very glad. Perhaps things will be better now. There seems more hope at last."

"Yes ! yes !" muttered Albrecht, "my time is coming, after all. I am to have the promised vengeance ; but, Marie, it cannot last for long. We must school ourselves to bear misery and to face death, for both will surely come" ; and his face grew dark in the August twilight.

"Is there no hope, Albrecht ?" cried Marie, sadly. "I do not care for vengeance. That will not help us."

"No. We are doomed. There is no hope, Marie."

"I cannot believe it, Albrecht ! If ever war was just and right, this war is so. How can we tell ? That strange battle in the clouds at Utrecht may have been the work of demons to terrify us. Or you may have read its meaning wrongly. Our Lord in heaven

is just and faithful ; He cannot break His word. He has promised to answer those who call upon Him ; and, Albrecht, have we not cried to Him for help ? Can it be possible that He will, at last, forsake us ? ”

“ It is not all prayer that receives its desired answer, Marie,” said Albrecht gloomily.

“ Perhaps not ; yet I hope, I trust, I pray for this answer still. Is not help already on the way ? Oh ! if Hélène were still alive.”

“ I thank God that she is dead. Can you wish her back again to life in Leyden now, when our last morsel of bread is spent and help is still far away ? We have been wretched for many weeks, Marie, but the worst is yet to come. The next few days (even if they *are* few, for our friends will have hard work to reach us) will try the endurance of the strongest, the courage of the bravest. Starvation is not our only danger ; there is daily fear of treachery ; some of the people are already beginning to clamour to Van der Werf to make terms with the Spaniards.”

“ But, Albrecht, they seemed content to-day.”

“ To-day they were excited by Prince William’s message ; to-morrow they will think of their hunger and their misery, and they will again cry out to us to open the gates ; and every day the clamour will grow louder, till at last some will save themselves by treachery ; for we cannot hold the city against Valdez without and a mob within.”

“Oh, Albrecht, what shall we do ?”

“We can do nothing ; we must wait. Our Prince is trying hard to save us, and we must have patience.”

Marie was silent for a few seconds, then said falteringly, “Albrecht, *should* we not do well to make terms with Valdez before it is too late ? Even that would be better than waiting till he forces his way into the town, or is let in by treachery.”

“Nay, Marie ; we must fight to the last !” replied her husband, frowning. “They might promise what they chose ; but, once in their power, we should suffer torture and indignities more horrible than aught we have yet endured. Besides, it would be base to William ; we have promised to hold out for three months, and I for one will not consent that we should break our word. Sooner than that we will set the city on fire and die within it. The Spaniard shall not set foot inside the wall until three months be past ; ay, and not then, please Heaven ! Desperation shall arm us, and the strength of despair is irresistible.”

Once more the dawning hope was crushed out of Marie’s heart. She had tried to believe in the efficacy of prayer, she had tried to rest herself on the “mercy of the Merciful” ; but when she spoke to Albrecht the shadow of his hopelessness fell over her, and, like him, she was inclined to turn her back upon the few gleams of sunshine that illumined their hard lot ;

though, unlike him, she gleaned no comfort from the dark prospect of coming vengeance.

The bright summer day was followed by an unusually dark night ; but so much the better for the purpose of the besiegers. They silently prepared themselves for the encounter, left the camp, and reached the foot of the wall. They intended the surprise to be complete, and for several days elaborate preparations had been made to avoid the stir and bustle at the last moment, which might have served as a warning to the watchful citizens. Valdez had divided his men into four companies, each under the command of a distinguished soldier. The first three divisions he had ordered to take up positions at certain weak places in the defences of the northern and western walls. With the fourth under his own immediate command, he designed to make an attack on the great gate of the city, intending by this means to draw the attention of the townspeople from the threatened portions of the walls, expecting that thus his forces would be allowed to effect an easy entrance.

His scheme was well laid, and but for the timely warning of William's messenger must almost certainly have been successful. The preliminaries of his plan were also well executed. The first three companies of soldiers had gained their positions in silence, and imagined that their presence was unsuspected, when Valdez made his attack upon the gate. His proceed-

ings were not silent, for his intention was to lead the besieged to suppose that his whole force was concentrated upon the one point. His project was favoured by the darkness, rendering it difficult for those on the walls to estimate the numbers of the attacking party.

Meanwhile, the Dutch had not been idle. Before nightfall they were in readiness at their posts, waiting in absolute stillness and silence for the struggle which might decide the fate of Leyden.

They allowed the Spaniards to gather in their places ; but as soon as the great bell of the town announced the commencement of the attack upon the gate, the defenders of the city waited no longer. Suddenly they appeared upon the wall, showering down huge stones and scalding water on the ambuscades huddled in the shadow waiting for the signal to attack. The surprise was complete, but on the other side to that which had been intended.

For a moment the Spaniards were confounded at the course events had taken. They turned, and would have fled ; but only for a moment. Soon their leaders rallied them, and brought them again to the attack. They were determined to succeed, and some even got a footing on the wall, but only to meet their doom. Though brave and experienced soldiers, they had been disconcerted and unnerved by the failure of their plan of surprise ; but the fight was long and desperate.

It was not until the east was grey that Valdez drew off his army, chagrined and angry at his non-success.

Albrecht van Hessfeldt had done good service on the western wall, where the conflict was hottest. He had no fear for himself and no mercy for his foe. His fierce spirit animated his men, and nowhere was the carnage more dreadful than at the place where Van Hessfeldt held command, in the post of honour and of danger—the weakest point of all. Perhaps for that very reason the Spanish onset was most obstinate there ; again and again the leader, a thin, grey-haired, fierce-eyed man, led his followers to the attack. Once he almost succeeded in scaling the wall, but he was forced back at last, after a desperate hand-to-hand fight with Albrecht himself. They were well matched in strength and courage and fierce enthusiasm, and (alas ! that I must say it) in relentless, merciless cruelty to their enemies. The Spaniard was cruel by nature ; Albrecht was cruel in his thirst for vengeance, yet for once he did show mercy, and it was to the pitiless leader himself.

They were, as I have said, well matched in other respects, but his position gave Albrecht the advantage. He was above upon the wall, the other was at the head of the scaling ladder, hooked into the masonry, and as they fought it shook and swung most perilously beneath his weight. At last, in aiming a heavy blow

at Van Hessfeldt, he overbalanced himself ; but catching at the ladder as he fell, he dropped his sword and hung defenceless in mid-air. Below him, in the first cold light of morning, he could see a heap of jagged blocks of stone. He looked down, and feared to lose his hold, for to fall upon the rough and splintered pile below meant almost certain death. He tried to scramble back to his place upon the ladder, but he was wearied with the recent encounter, and stiff with age and bruises. Above stood Van Hessfeldt with one foot on the ladder, and his sword raised to strike the fatal blow.

The old man's hours were numbered. He gave some quick, impatient orders to his men, but they seemed to be either careless or afraid, and they scarcely tried to save him. Albrecht bent forward, when suddenly a young and noble-looking Spaniard appeared out of the grey mist that hung over the scene. "Help, men, help !" he cried ; "to the rescue ! look to your captain, *Señor del Rio* !"

His words were enough. Van Hessfeldt stepped back upon the wall, and stood with the point of his sword sunk to the earth, waiting. His face was grave and stern as ever ; he watched his enemy intently, but made no further attempt to hinder his escape.

The Spaniard sprang up the ladder and fearlessly assisted Del Rio to gain a safer position, but Albrecht still stood quietly watching, and deliberately allowed

them to reach the ground in safety. His thoughts of vengeance seemed to be forgotten.

His antagonist was not so generous ; he snatched a musket from a soldier near at hand, and fired upon his chivalrous foe. His aim was good, but, quick as thought, his companion knocked up the muzzle of his gun, and the bullet passed over the Netherlander's head.

"What are you thinking of, Señor da Sessa ?" cried Del Rio roughly. "The man is a rebel and a heretic ; he well deserves to die !"

But Da Sessa turned carelessly away, saying, "He has just spared us. I would not have it said that the Dutch know better than the Spaniards how to be generous and chivalrous, even to their foes."

In spite of his annoyance Don Vasco was too prudent to forget, even in the heat of battle, to whom he was speaking, so he said no more ; content rather to accept the slight to his character and the insubordination to his authority as a superior officer, than to throw difficulties in the way of the alliance on which he had set his heart.

The fight lasted a few moments longer ; then Valdez drew his forces together and returned to the camp, having suffered severely in the night's engagement.

The citizens lost fewer men, but they could ill spare one of their brave defenders, for even at first the garrison had been too small to adequately protect the

town, and now it was reduced to little more than half its original number, and all were weak from want of food. Had Valdez but known it, the town must have fallen if the struggle had been protracted for a few hours longer. Happily, he did not know it, and he allowed the besieged time to recover from their exhaustion before he again attacked them.

Slowly and wearily the days went by; the city sank again into the terrible monotony of despair. The water was slowly rising over the land, and William was diligently collecting vessels and supplies, but they knew that the chances were much against them. Should the water deepen sufficiently to permit the Dutch fleet to approach Leyden, they would have to fight every inch of the way, and in the meantime the citizens might be reduced by starvation. Already everything fit for human sustenance had been consumed, and they were living on the leaves of the trees, on rats and mice, and such other substitutes for wholesome food as they could find. Even these would soon fail, and then their fate could be averted no longer.

To add to their distress, the Prince of Orange had fallen ill. The same messenger who brought the news of his arrangements for their relief informed them of his sickness, and they soon received intelligence that he was worse; but his care for them was unremitting. He still hurried forward the preparations for the

expedition. His death would throw everything into confusion, for it seemed as if the Dutch would then be left without a leader. And, alas ! it was more than probable that he would die ; he was dangerously ill, and many believed him to be already dying. Was not the case of Leyden hopeless ?

Albrecht relapsed once more into fierce despair. Others might taste revenge, he never would. Marie still cried to God, the merciful, for comfort and relief ; but still (it seemed) she cried in vain, and after many days of ever-deepening misery she prayed no more for the coming of their friends ; she asked only that she and those she loved in Leyden might speedily end their sorrows in the grave. Death was the only blessing that she craved.

## CHAPTER VI.

“In doubt and great perplexity.”



AUGUST was drawing to a close when Padre Losada once more presented himself before Anita to demand her final answer. He imagined that she would be ready to submit to the authority of the Church, but he was mistaken ; she was defiant as ever. He wondered at her firmness, but scarcely regretted it, fanatic as he was, for he had never sincerely wished to save her, either from her errors or the consequences of them. He came to her early in the afternoon, but only remained to deliver an official message from the Council of Blood, intimating that unless she made her submission to him without delay, and entreated him to intercede for her, she should be treated as a recusant. Her reply was a most positive refusal, and he left her immediately.

A terrible prospect lay before her, and Anita felt its horror fully, in spite of her defiance of the priest. At first she could think of nothing else, and over and over again she seemed to hear the grave, unmoved voice of Josef Losada recounting, in gruesome detail, the sufferings apportioned to heretics. She tried to forget it, but could not. Every word that he had spoken seemed burnt into her memory. How could she bear it? Humiliation, degradation, *agony*, mental and bodily!

No; she would *not* bear it. She would escape. She would not wait for Padre Losada's tender mercies. Yet what escape was possible?

She thought of Alonzo da Sessa, and his generous, faithful love. But she had deliberately shut that door of escape with her own hands. A month earlier, submission to her uncle would have saved her, but now she had to satisfy Losada. And he would have little more compunction in martyring Da Sessa's wife than Del Rio's niece. It might involve Alonzo in her ruin. No; she had persistently refused him when she had been comparatively prosperous; she had no right now to sacrifice him because she was in danger of death and had some vague hope that he might possibly save her. Was there no other way?

How could there be another way? A lonely girl in a hostile country, what possible chance had she against the terrible Inquisition, with all its secret machinery?

And yet she did dream of escape. She rose, opened a concealed drawer in a cabinet in her room, and took out of it a bundle of letters yellow with age. She looked over them carefully and hopefully.

It was only within the last three months that she had found these letters, and from them she had gleaned all she knew (and it was very little) of the Reformed doctrines. They were chiefly from her "heretic" father to her mother; but she had never seen them until lately, when she had discovered them by accident. She had been very young at the time her father died, but she had been much attached to him. The manner of his death had been concealed from her, and she had been brought up as a Romanist, but his letters soon destroyed the effect of her earlier training, and the story of his fate made a deep impression on her. From the moment of her obtaining possession of the hidden packet she was lost to the Church of Rome.

Her mother had lived and died a Papist; a weak woman, unable to make up her mind, she had long halted between the two opinions, but the death of her husband removed the only influence which had been on the side of the Reformed religion, and for the last three or four years of her life she had formed her ideas on the model of Padre Losada's. She remembered her husband with affection, but she had been taught by his murderers to regard his opinions as so wicked and so dangerous that she forgave their crime on the

ground of its necessity. It was strange that she had dared to keep his letters ; perhaps she had forgotten or mislaid them ; certainly Losada had no idea that they were still in existence, or he would have insisted on their immediate destruction.

Her mother had been dead for nearly six years when Anita found the packet which was to exercise so great an influence over her. Padre Josef was puzzled to discover how she had received the infection of heresy. Since her childhood she had been under his own supervision in spiritual matters, and he was certain she had not come in contact with any contaminating influence since the time of her father's death. He took refuge at last in the idea that Anita's heterodoxy was either spontaneous or hereditary, but this consideration was discouraging to the good man in his efforts to reclaim or exterminate the erring. If the disease was liable to reappear thus in after generations, what hope was there of ever bringing it to an end ? The work of the faithful servants of the Church would be practically futile.

Anita was still uncertain as to her father's fate when she had read all his letters told her, but from her maid (an old woman who had served her mother before her) she learnt the rest, and from that time she could not endure the sight of either Losada or her uncle.

In character she much more nearly resembled her

father than her mother. She was impulsive, affectionate, truthful, and strong of will, and it seemed that her father's qualities were to bring upon her her father's fate—unless she could escape.

These letters seemed to point out a possible way, but one so full of danger that she feared to try it.

At this moment her meditations were interrupted. A servant entered bearing an urgent message from Da Sessa, entreating her to see him.

Anita hesitated, and then gave the required permission. She would tell him all ; she would not, she could not, marry him, but she would explain her whole position to him, and perhaps he might advise her what to do. She knew at least that he would not betray her, and, alas for her ! he was her only friend in Veenendaal except one or two of her uncle's servants.

Da Sessa entered the room hastily, and his face was pale and agitated. He scarcely waited for the door to close before he began, "Have you reconsidered your decision, Anita ? Will you be my wife ?"

"No, never !" she said firmly. "Do not ask me to change my mind."

"But, Anita ! for your sake, if not for mine, listen for one moment !" he cried.

"Señor da Sessa, I *cannot* answer you differently" ; but he fancied that her tone was regretful, and he spoke again, "Anita, will you not even *try* to care a little for me ?"

“No,” she said, “I dare not promise even to *try* to care for you.”

“I say again—for your own sake—Anita ! Anita ! let me save you. Do you know what Losada is threatening ? Have pity on yourself ! Spare *me* ; I cannot, I will not see you die ! Oh ! Anita, do you prefer death, *death* by the Inquisition, to life with me ?” His voice was reproachful in its grief and pain, and Anita pitied him at last.

“Señor, nothing that you can do will save me now,” she replied. “There is no time. To-night I must escape, if I am to escape at all. To-morrow I shall be beyond all hope. Padre Josef said that they would fetch me before noon.” She spoke so quietly that Alonzo scarcely realised what her words meant.

“Who ? Where ?” he asked.

“I don’t know where they send their prisoners : it matters very little ; I do not intend to wait until they come. I shall leave this place to-night.”

“But where can you go ?” asked Alonzo. “The ports are watched, even if you could reach them. You would be safe nowhere in Holland or Spain. If you once leave Veenendaal, you will be in equal danger from Dutch and Spanish. Believe me, flight is worse than useless.”

“It is *certain* death to stay here.”

“Listen to me, and I will save you yet—yes, and I will ask for nothing in return. By morning I will put

you safe beyond Losada's reach ; I will take you to my aunt at Bruges. She will hide you until I can find means to force these priests to take back their lying words. Or, better still, come with me now into the village, take refuge at my house, and no one will dare molest you. Anita, do not refuse me this small thing ? Come, and I will protect you against all the world, if need be. Come, and I swear to you that I will ask for no reward. I will trust you to think kindly of me, if you can, and that shall be all."

"Señor, it is most generous, noble, and like yourself, but it cannot be. Why should you risk your life for me ?"

"I need not risk my life, though you know that for you I would gladly lay it down. But I have my own men about me. I have wealth and influence. It is no idle boast, Anita ; I think they dare not anger me. Trust yourself to my protection, and I will keep you safe. I *will* ! even if to do it I have to join with this William of Nassau and the Netherlanders. I am in earnest ; they shall not dare to touch you !"

Anita shook her head ; she doubted his power to save her. It was a wild scheme and a hopeless one. Besides, it would involve Alonzo's ruin with almost equal certainty, whether it failed or succeeded.

"Señor," she said, "I would not have you rebel against your king and become a traitor to your country for my sake."

His face darkened. “I would do more for you! Besides, if my king and my country choose to support the priests in the tyranny that they are exercising over good Catholics, as well as heretics, they cannot call me a traitor for trying to defend the innocent from oppression.”

“In this matter I am not innocent, Señor da Sessa! I am what they call a heretic.” She hoped that now he would be willing to leave her to her fate. “I hate the false creed of these blood-stained monks!”

“I am no theologian, Anita; I am a soldier (God forgive me if I have used my sword on the side of injustice), unused to argument, and unable to decide on the merits of different creeds. From this time I will call no man ‘heretic,’ let him believe what he will.” He was silent for a minute; then added quickly and incoherently, “You shall not stay here to be murdered, Anita! If you will not give me leave to save you, I swear, by all the saints in heaven, that I will do so against your will. You shall not die, or I will die with you! I would sooner kill you with my own hands than trust you to the priests of the Inquisition. You don’t know what they are, Anita. The final pangs of death would be the smallest part of your sufferings.”

She turned pale, but said calmly, “You must not fear for me. I will leave here to-night.”

“Alone?” he asked.

“No ; my maid, Isabella, will come with me.”

“Where do you intend to go ?”

“I do not know. If it were possible, to go to Leyden would be the best, I think.”

“*Leyden?*” he repeated, thinking that her danger had unsettled her reason. “Leyden, did you say ?”

“Yes !” she returned. “I will tell you why. A few weeks ago I found some old letters written by my father ; some many years ago, others immediately before his death. I had not known till then how and when he died. I only knew that there was some mystery connected with him. I understand all now ; for what the papers did not explain I induced Isabella to tell me. You know that for some years before his marriage my father was in attendance upon the Emperor Charles. During that time he made the acquaintance of a young Netherlander, Arend van Hessfeldt, who was some years older than himself. They soon became fast friends, and were extremely intimate, until Seigneur van Hessfeldt returned to Holland, where he owned large estates in this neighbourhood.”

“I have heard the name of Van Hessfeldt,” said Alonzo, thoughtfully, “but I fancied he was a young man.”

“This gentleman must be sixty or seventy, if he is still living. My father never saw him again until he came to this country, eleven years since. When

they met once more, both had become converts to the Reformed religion, and Arend van Hessfeldt was a prisoner, travelling under a strong guard, to be tried by the Inquisition at Brussels. Remembering their old friendship, my father contrived his escape, and his life was saved. But a servant, in whom he had been obliged to confide, betrayed my father to his own brother, my uncle Vasco, and he had the baseness to give him up as a heretic. You know, or you can imagine, what his fate would be."

She stopped for a moment, but quickly recovered herself, and added, "Now you see why I would go to Leyden. Seigneur van Hessfeldt lived there, and I can prove the truth of my story by my father's letters. My father thought him just and humane, and I do not think he would refuse to shelter and protect me, if I could but reach him. It is, at least, my only hope."

"It is not your only hope. Trust me instead. How could you make your way into Leyden? And if you could, do you not know that the city is starving? It must fall in a week or two at furthest; what mercy could you expect then? Let me help you. Anita, Anita! do not throw your life away rather than accept help from me. You know that I love you; you know that I would die to save you. Do not treat me so unkindly, cruelly, unjustly!"

But Anita had schooled herself to bear this. For a

moment she was grave and silent, for she was obliged to admit that he was right ; she had been mad to think of seeking safety by going to Leyden. By-and-by, she said slowly, “I will go, then, to Prince William, at Rotterdam ; I believe that he will befriend me, and, at the worst, I can but die !”

Alonzo tried to alter her decision, but in vain. Wild as this scheme seemed, it was at least as good as any other that had been suggested ; and at last he gave up *his* plan, and endeavoured to help her to take the easiest and safest way of putting her own into execution. It was a terrible risk, but the danger of doing nothing was still greater.

They finally arranged that Anita and her attendant, Isabella, whom they had taken into consultation, were to assume the dress of Dutch peasant women. Isabella refused to be left behind, though her mistress had generously urged her to remain, in spite of her own great need of her companionship. Alonzo promised to provide horses, and to escort them some distance on their way. They were to meet him on the outskirts of the village as soon as it was dark.

“Can you find the way to Rotterdam ?” he asked anxiously.

“I think so. At least, I can inquire it. I can speak enough Dutch for that.”

“Then, good-bye, for the present. I will wait for you at the three large willows on the Rosenwinkel

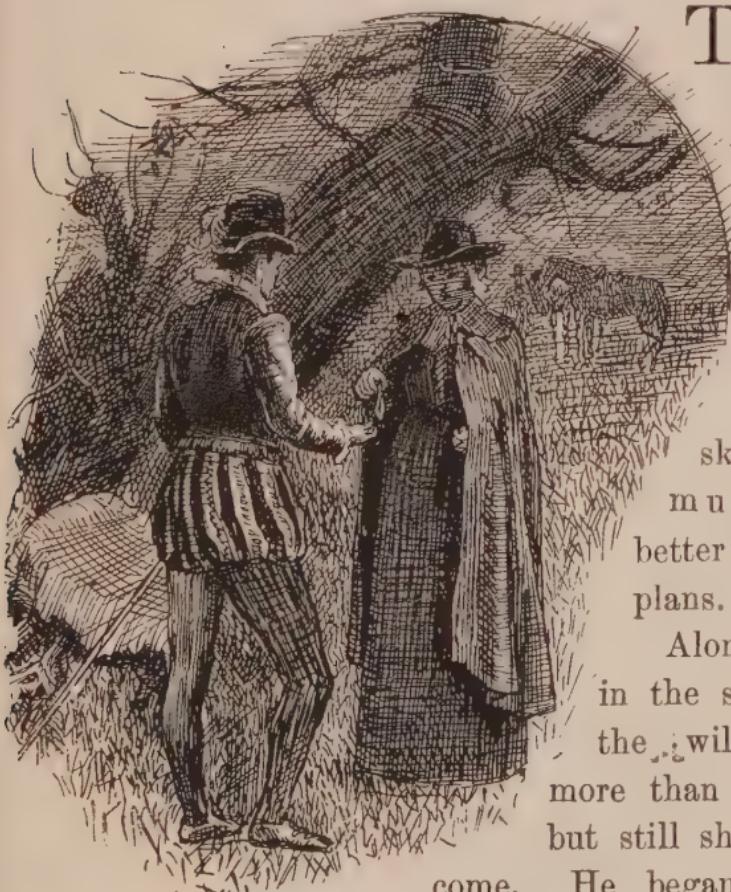
road. Be sure to come early, for there is no time to lose," he said, as he was leaving the room.

"Take care!" exclaimed Anita. "Remember my father's fate, and let no one discover that you have helped me."

"I will be careful. There is no danger." And before she could say more he was gone.

## CHAPTER VII.

"And I . . . go forth companionless,  
And the days darken round me."



THE night  
was  
stormy  
and dark;  
not a star  
was to be  
seen in  
all the  
cloudy  
sky, but so  
much the  
better for Anita's  
plans.

Alonzo waited  
in the shadow of  
the willows for  
more than an hour,  
but still she did not  
come. He began to feel  
anxious, the time seemed so very long. Suppose

Vasco del Rio had discovered her purpose—suppose Isabella had proved treacherous—suppose that they had lost their way in the darkness—suppose—— But here they were at last ! No ; it was only the wind rustling the leaves of the trees. What if Losada had got to know of her intended flight ? But as the thought rose in his mind, two cloaked and muffled figures appeared out of the darkness, and the taller one was certainly Anita.

“ We were unable to leave the house for some time after we ought to have started,” she explained. “ I am sorry that we have kept you in the wind and rain so long.”

“ I was afraid that some misfortune had happened to you,” he said, as he helped her to mount her horse.

They travelled quickly for the first five or six miles, but beyond that the roads were bad, in some places being flooded, and they were forced to proceed more slowly. They were also obliged to make a considerable circuit to avoid passing through the little hamlet of Rosenwinkel, which was held by the Spaniards ; but, in spite of all mischances, they were within ten or twelve miles of Rotterdam when they met with their first serious difficulty. In front stretched a long group of willows, to the right lay a vast extent of flooded pasture-land, and in places the water had overflowed the path which they would be obliged to travel. Their horses

splashed and stumbled ; the road was hard to follow ; and, to their dismay, as soon as they reached the drier land beyond the trees, they saw a party of men, not far away, with lighted torches in their hands. They were soldiers, but whether Dutch or Spanish they could not tell, and the presence of either was dangerous in their present predicament. Judging by their lights, they were at present stationary ; but how long they would remain so was questionable. If they went on they might blunder into the midst of them ; and if they turned back they would probably be overtaken.

Anita was the first to recover herself. “ *Señor*,” she said, “ we must part here. Thank you for your company so far.”

“ I cannot go and leave you here alone.”

“ It would be the wisest and safest plan. I am sure you had better turn back with the horses at once, and Isabella and I will go into the woods behind here and hide until they have passed. Besides,” she added, “ it is time that you returned now in any case, or you will not reach home before daylight.”

“ At least, stay one moment, while I find a hiding place for you. I cannot leave you in this way.” So saying, he sprang from his horse and disappeared in the darkness. He was not long away.

“ There are fewer trees here than I had hoped,” he

said. "I have found a place that I think may do ; but I am afraid it is very wet all about here. I wish I could have discovered a better place."

It *was* wet, as Anita discovered as soon as her feet touched the ground—in fact, the mud was almost ankle deep.

About ten yards from the road stood a large clump of trees, growing curiously close together, with their arms crossing and re-crossing in every direction. Across the roots of one of them Alonzo had placed a few sticks, making a rude, but not uncomfortable seat, to which the great trunk behind formed a back. Upon it he had spread a thick, heavy cloak, which he had worn to keep off the rain ; but, in spite of his exertions, it scarcely looked a pleasant place in which to pass the remainder of the night. He said something of the kind when he took them to it, but Anita was only surprised that he should have been able, in the darkness, to find so good a retreat.

"Now," she said, "once more I must ask you to leave us."

"I will go, though I cannot bear to leave you here ; but—" he stopped, and hesitated, then added quickly, "I want to give you this first." He put into her hand a purse of gold. "No ! don't refuse it. You will need it, and I have no use for it ; I have more than I shall ever spend. Surely you will not refuse me this little thing, this very little thing ? You would take it, I

am certain, if you knew how much pleasure it would give me."

Anita was silent. She did not wish to take money from him, of all men. She had inherited a full share of the pride of her ancestors.

"I do not need it; why should you refuse it?" asked Alonzo again. "You know that I wished all I have to be yours; nay! I wish it still. Can you not do me even this small favour?"

"Then, if you insist upon it, I will take it," she replied. "I cannot thank you for your kindness, but you must believe that I feel it deeply. I wish that I deserved it; I wish I could be what you have thought me. Forgive me for the injury that I have done you."

Her tone did not belie her words; she was very sorry. The strong, stern light of this terrible parting had forced her to see and understand his love. She knew now that he was noble and unselfish. Until the last few hours she had underrated and misjudged him. He was not the careless, light-headed, light-hearted boy she had imagined him; he was a man capable of deep thought and feeling, and she was grieved that she had wronged him even in her own mind; so she said "good-bye" very sorrowfully, almost tenderly, to the lover whom at one time she had absolutely hated. Neither of them expected to meet again for many years, if ever; and perhaps this helped to dispel

Anita's cold reserve. She said good-bye so sadly that her evident regret made their parting all the harder for Alonzo; and even now he made one more effort to induce her to change her mind.

Alas! after all she had no feeling but grateful friendship for him, and he was turning away when she called him back. "Señor, will you take this and keep it in remembrance of her whom you have so nobly befriended?" She gave him a little jewelled cross attached to a slender chain which she had been accustomed to wear round her neck. He could find no words to thank her, but seemed rooted to the spot till Anita suddenly exclaimed in a frightened tone: "Oh, go quickly! the lights are moving. Have mercy on me and go while there is time, or I shall be guilty of your death!"

Her words had no effect. "Let me die!" he said. "What have I to live for?"

"Go!" she said again, "or we shall *all* die. If they find Carlos and the horses we are lost!"

As the meaning of her words entered his mind, Da Sessa caught both her hands in his own and kissed them passionately; then went with a hurried step through the crackling branches, like one in a dream, and she saw him no more.

Then followed, for Anita, a night of misery—horror would not be too strong a word. At first she feared chiefly for Alonzo's safety, but a few minutes passed

and she knew that he had escaped, for she heard the tread of the horses' feet as they gained the firm road beyond the wood. The soldiers had not pursued them, for the lights were still once more, and by-and-by were extinguished one after another.

But, as the hours went on, vague terrors for herself and Isabella began to haunt her. She did not know what she feared. She had indeed good reason for her dread, but it was not the party of men encamped so near them that made her flesh creep and her blood tingle with horror ; what she feared was in the air around her, in those creaking, groaning branches above her head—were they *never* still ? She did not dare to move, she had no voice to speak, she could not shut her eyes, for beside her the shadows became faces—apish, mocking faces, distorted with grim laughter at her misery. Everywhere they met her view—faces such as earth has never seen ; faces of goblins, faces of dying men, skeleton faces with horrid teeth and clattering jaws ; faces of demons, faces of she knew not what ! She could bear it no longer, and, with a low moan, she buried her face on her knees : but now—oh, horror !—they were between her and the tree—she knew it ; she could almost feel them move. So she sat upright again, with her back against the trunk—it, at least, was tangible and solid—and put her arms round Isabella, who was of a philosophical turn of mind, and, by way of making the best of a bad business, had settled her-

self to get a little sleep while she could. She was not imaginative, and neither made new terrors for herself nor exaggerated those dangers that really existed ; thus she was singularly well suited to accompany her mistress on her perilous journey. She was much attached to Anita, though, like many another old servant, she sometimes forgot the respect she owed to her "young lady" in her zeal. She would have had the *Señorita* marry Don Alonzo da Sessa, and had urged his claims to favour with all the arguments she could muster ; but though her advice had been disregarded, she insisted on following her mistress wherever her fortunes might lead her, and a valuable and faithful friend Anita found her.

Now that Alonzo was gone beyond recall, Anita regretted that she had insisted on his going. It was terrible in the damp, dark woods with those spectral faces flitting round her ; she felt that she would have given anything to have him again by her side. But now it was impossible ; she had moulded her fate for herself, and she must bear it. Why had she been unable to love him ? Brave, handsome, gentle, and true, surely she ought to have cared for him ? Yet she did not, and in her heart she knew that, to her dying day, she never would have loved him as he loved her. Her courage seemed to have deserted her, perils surrounded her on every hand, and now and here they terrified her. Would not the known dangers

of the Inquisition have been easier to face than the grim uncertainties that lay before them? If they failed to reach Rotterdam, if William of Orange refused to befriend her, or if her uncle discovered her flight and overtook them, what could they do?

While she was trying to answer these questions she fell into a troubled sleep. When she awoke the sun was rising, and its beams shone full upon the group of men whose appearance had so much alarmed her the night before. Apparently they belonged to William's army, for she could see by the crescents in their caps that they were Zealanders. They seemed to be preparing to continue their march, but in a very leisurely fashion. Anita woke Isabella, and they were discussing how to proceed on their journey, when they were startled by perceiving a body of Spanish soldiers riding briskly towards them. As they came nearer, Anita recognised among them her uncle and Josef Losada. She could not doubt that they were in pursuit of her; but by what means they had learnt the direction of her flight she never discovered.

“Isabella!” she exclaimed, “they are certain to search the wood; it is useless to try to hide: what can we do?”

“I do not know, Señorita. We can do nothing, I fear.”

But the girl did not intend to die without an effort to save herself and her companion. “Isabella,” she

said, "do as I tell you and come with me." So saying, she made her way out of the wood, on the side nearest the Dutchmen ; she walked quickly, but made no attempt to conceal herself. As she expected, the Spanish horsemen soon caught sight of them, and recognised her. She heard them shout to her to stop, and her face turned pale, but she went on still more quickly.

The road was difficult, and the Spaniards' horses were plunging in the mud ; in another moment they would reach the drier ground, and would overtake them without an effort.

"They are mad to think that they can escape," muttered Losada to Del Rio ; "perhaps they think we do not recognise them."

He did not see the party of Netherlanders towards which Anita was hastening, for the trees concealed them from his view.

"Make haste, Isabella," said Anita, as soon as she saw that the Dutchmen had noticed them ; "we must run."

They did run, but the Spaniards gained on them fast. Anita cried out for help in Dutch, but, till their pursuers came in sight, the Netherlanders did not move ; then their captain gave a hasty order, and his men rushed forward to meet the Spaniards, just as they came up with Anita and her maid.

There was a short skirmish, but Del Rio's party was

far outnumbered, and he was forced to retreat without his niece. Indeed, he narrowly escaped being made prisoner himself, and Losada received a wound from which he never recovered. He had been particularly determined not to permit his victim to escape ; and when he saw that they would not be allowed to take her back with them, he struck at her furiously with a heavy mace that he carried.

The blow would probably have been fatal, but that a ferocious-looking Zealander, seeing her danger, warded off the stroke, and smote the churchman so hard upon his head that he fell from his horse. A Spanish soldier dragged him from among the trampling feet of the combatants, and he was borne away half dead. His countrymen followed, urging their wearied steeds through the mud and water, beyond which lay their only path to safety. The Zealanders would willingly have pursued them, but they had other work to do, and were thus obliged to let them escape.

They had waited all night long to intercept certain important despatches, which, they had been informed, would be sent by this route to Alva; but they were obliged to return without having accomplished their errand. Their ship lay waiting for them some two miles away, but the main body of the fleet had reached the “Land-scheiding,” a great dyke within five miles of Leyden, which they had hitherto been unable to pass.

Anita asked to be allowed to proceed to Rotterdam; but the leader of the party which had protected them took no notice of her entreaties, and hurried her on in quite a different direction. The man was not uncivil, but treated them as prisoners. He would not hear a word of explanation; neither would he say what he intended doing with them. Altogether their position was scarcely more enviable than it had been during the previous night, but it would have been still worse had her uncle's party overtaken them when they were alone. All present danger of the Inquisition was over, whatever else might lie before them.



## CHAPTER VIII.

“They are dangerous guides, the feelings.”

“WHO are you? and why do you wish to go to Rotterdam?”

The question was asked by a good-looking, soldierly man, past the prime of life, but vigorous and keen-witted as ever. His features were stern, and the expression of his face appeared to be entirely under its owner's control. Anita and her maid were now on board the *Avenger*, one of the largest of the vessels under Boisot's command, and were undergoing a severe cross-examination from its captain, Count van Sittart.

“My name is Anita del Rio, and I wish to see the Prince of Orange,” she replied. “This is my servant.”

“Anita del Rio ! Then you are Spanish. Why have you left your friends ? What is your errand to the Prince of Orange ? ”

Anita told her story, to which Count van Sittart listened with dignified politeness. When she had finished, he turned to one of the men behind him, saying, “Will you tell Captain van Hessfeldt that I should like to see him for a few minutes ? ”

Anita had not expected to find her father’s friend with the relieving army, yet it was possible that it might be he. Nothing further was said until Captain van Hessfeldt arrived. His face was a pleasant one, with its good-humoured, mischief-loving dark eyes, and well-cut features ; but Anita was disappointed in his appearance, for he was much too young to be her father’s friend.

“It is possible, Captain van Hessfeldt,” began the Count, “that you may be able to prove the truth of this young lady’s story. She says that her father rendered an important service to a gentleman of the name of Arend van Hessfeldt. That, I believe, was your father’s name.”

Bertrand bowed in evident surprise. There was a certain incongruity between the Dutch peasant’s dress and the face and manner of their wearer. “Then,” he exclaimed, turning to Anita, “your father’s name must have been Hernando del Rio ? ”

“Yes, it was,” she answered.

“And it seems,” went on Count van Sittart, “that she herself is now in danger from the Inquisition. She asks to be allowed to proceed to Rotterdam ; she wishes to see the Prince. But, by-the-bye, Captain van Hessfeldt, should you be able to recognise Señor del Rio’s handwriting ?”

Bertrand examined the letters of Anita’s packet closely, and a little doubtfully ; at last he took one small scrap of paper from the rest. It was unsigned, but was addressed to Hernando del Rio. Its contents were unimportant. “I should know this writing,” he said ; “it is my father’s.”

“Don’t be in too much hurry, Bertrand,” remarked his superior officer, gravely, but in an undertone not intended for Anita’s ears. “Appearances are greatly against them. Why should this young lady be so anxious to gain audience of the Prince ? Her story sounds improbable.”

“I cannot doubt, sir, that she is Del Rio’s daughter. Her knowledge of my father’s story, her possession of his handwriting, would go far towards proving the truth of the account she has given you.”

“To my mind they do not conclusively prove it. There are many ways in which she might have possessed herself both of the facts and of the letters.”

“But what could be her object in attempting to deceive us ? It is unlikely that she would run in such

danger, and take so much trouble, unless she was absolutely obliged."

"In past times, Bertrand, there have been women who had as little dread of martyrdom as men. This girl seems brave enough, and, for aught I know, may be fanatical enough to seek renown on earth and reward in heaven by helping her king and her Church to rid themselves of the chief obstacle in their way. Were William dead, they think their victory would be easy."

"But do you mean to say that they would send a woman, a girl, on such an errand? Count van Sittart, I will not believe it! *They* couldn't be so cowardly; *she* couldn't be so wicked, so cruel!"

"I have known cowardly priests and cruel women," replied the elder man. "I assure you, Bertrand, that they will spare no pains to deprive us of our head; and it behoves us to be careful. Better err on the side of safety than sacrifice a life so precious to sentimental considerations."

"But how *could* she do such a thing?"

"Those Spanish priests have secret poisons which a girl could use as easily as a man."

Van Hessfeldt turned to look at the erect, graceful figure, and calm, grave face of the Spanish girl. He could not believe in the possibility of an assassin's appearing in such a guise. "Sir," he said, "I am convinced that she is what she represents herself to be."

“ And if she is, she still may be a more dangerous enemy to the peace and liberties of Holland than Duke Alva himself. She may be Del Rio’s daughter, I dare say she is, but, until she can give a better account of herself, she shall not, with my leave, proceed to Rotterdam.”

“ What, then, is she to do ? ” asked Bertrand impatiently. “ I cannot but think your suspicions unjust. Van Zandt told me that she and the woman who is with her were running away from a party of Spanish soldiers, and that they cried out to him for help. Is it likely that if her story were untrue, they would have needed to do that ? ”

“ It is not impossible that they might have chosen to do it to give colour to their story. Remember, that if she is Hernando del Rio’s daughter, she is also Vasco del Rio’s niece, and of all the bloodthirsty villains in Philip’s service, he is the worst. You must not forget that, by her own showing, it is in his house that she has lived, it is he who has brought her up, and it is by no means unlikely that she may have been more influenced by her uncle than by her father.”

“ Shall you send her back to him then ? ” asked the young man half sarcastically.

“ No, I shall not do that. If she is innocent, it would be purposeless cruelty ; if she is guilty, it would be merely giving her a second chance to execute her plans.

I will do nothing till I see what Admiral Boisot thinks about her."

They had begun to talk more loudly now, and at this point Anita stepped forward, saying, "Señor, you compliment my courage at the expense of my discretion. I think that your Prince William would have heard me more fairly ; but even if you will not permit me to continue my journey to Rotterdam, be merciful, and do not give me up to the Inquisition. Rather slay us yourselves than that."

Count van Sittart made no answer for many minutes. At last he said, "If I spare you, will you prove your sincerity ?"

"How, Señor ?"

"You know on what errand we are bound ?" Anita bent her head. "Furnish me, then, with information concerning the plans of your countrymen ; tell me what they propose to do should Leyden still hold out ; give me an account (a full account) of the fortifications at Veenendaal, and I will set you free."

Veenendaal was only a small village, but its possession gave the Spaniards command of a large tract of country lying between Leyden and her deliverers ; and prevented the Dutch from obtaining access to the city by means of a canal, which in times of peace formed the easiest approach to it on the south.

"Señor," replied Anita, "I can do none of these things. I know nothing of the intentions of my

countrymen ; neither am I acquainted with the plan of the fortifications at Veenendaal, excepting in so far at least as any one who has passed through the village is acquainted with it. I could give you no information which would be of the slightest use to you. My uncle, if he knows the general's plans, has not confided them to me."

" You mean to say you *will* tell me nothing ? " replied Count van Sittart, frowning.

" I am thankful that I *can* tell you nothing ! " she answered hastily.

" Think the matter over, young lady. I am convinced that you can tell me what I wish to know. Answer a few questions, and your life shall be spared. In the first place, what number of soldiers is usually posted at Veenendaal ? "

" I never heard, Señor."

" If you refuse to answer you shall be dealt with as a spy—you and your servant also. I cannot believe that you have lived so long under Vasco del Rio's roof without learning something of the purposes and resources of the army in which he serves."

" It is true, nevertheless. I have lived under his roof, but I have rarely passed an hour in his company, or mingled with his guests. He has used me coldly and cruelly ; he has wronged me bitterly ; and he dislikes me. I know nothing of his plans or his pursuits ; and I can tell you nothing. Send me to your Prince.

Let him judge whether I have told the truth or not."

"Is this your final answer?"

"Yes!" said Anita firmly. She was glad, as she had said, that she knew nothing, for, much as she detested the war in which the Spaniards were engaged, they were still her countrymen, and she would have deemed herself dishonoured had she betrayed them. She spoke truly, she knew *nothing* that would have been of the least use to Count van Sittart; yet, homeless fugitive as she was, having cut off all possibility of return to her native land, she could not forget it; and (perhaps inconsistently) felt that she would have deserved scorn if she had earned her safety from the Netherlanders by treachery to Spain.

Count van Sittart turned and spoke a few words to Bertrand, which Anita did not hear. The young man had been a silent, but deeply interested, auditor during the last few minutes. Now he protested energetically against his senior's command or proposal. "I cannot consent to it, sir. Her father died for mine—*died*, I say, and I will not (if I can prevent it) see his daughter slaughtered. I will appeal to Boisot, yes, and to William himself. I do not believe that she is a spy. You are suspicious and unmerciful, Count van Sittart."

"Ah, Bertrand!" said the old man, in a tone meant only for Van Hessfeldt's ears, "you are young yet, but before you are as old as I am you will have learnt

many a hard and bitter lesson, and among them, that a lovely face is sometimes only a mask for wickedness and falsehood. You think she must be good and true, because she is so pretty—well! well! at your age I should have thought the same.”

“ Her guilt is not proved,” replied Van Hessfeldt, quickly ; “ it would be unjust, cruel, to treat her as a spy because she has fled to us in her extremity. Sir! as we all hope for mercy, be merciful to her, and to the poor old woman with her. Sir, as a favour to myself, grant them life and freedom ; and I swear by the Heaven above, I swear by the name my fathers bore, and never sullied or dishonoured, that I will answer with my own life for fault or treachery of theirs !”

“ Freedom I cannot grant them, Bertrand ; life I will, as you will take it upon yourself to be surety for them. Until we reach Leyden you must consider them as under your charge. This is no time to examine into the rights of their case.”

“ Perhaps my brother may help to prove their innocence !” exclaimed Bertrand.

“ I trust he may.” Then turning to Anita he said, “ For the present, lady, you are safe. Captain van Hessfeldt has interceded for you, but you must consider yourselves as his prisoners ; and should you attempt treachery, or try to escape, he will be held answerable.”

“ Captain van Hessfeldt, I thank you for your

kindness to us. It will not be my fault if you suffer for it."

"I trust you, Señora. I am glad to be able to show my remembrance of the debt I owe to your father."

Count van Sittart dismissed them with cold politeness, and, for some minutes after they had gone, his face was grave and anxious; but by-and-by an expression of amusement passed over it, and at last he laughed outright, muttering to himself, "Upon my word, I think the boy is right. She does not look like a spy or an assassin. I will watch her, and should things go well, she shall hear no more of the matter. In the meantime, Bertrand will take care of her; I did well to make him her jailer. He ought to thank me for giving him so rare an opportunity of exhibiting the character of a gentle and chivalrous knight."

Van Hessfeldt's boat, the *Star of Hope*, was a small flat-bottomed vessel, manned chiefly by Zealanders, or "sea beggars," as they called themselves. Bertrand did his utmost to make his prisoners comfortable; and they were too thankful to be in such good hands to have any inclination to complain of the inevitable hardships of their position.

They were kindly and considerately treated by the rough and savage men who formed the crew, even though it soon became known that they were both Spaniards. Count van Sittart himself occasionally sent small comforts and delicacies to the captives on

board the *Star of Hope*; while Bertrand could not do enough to prove his gratitude to Anita's father.

Nevertheless, in spite of all the kindness shown to her, Anita was not happy. It was terrible to see so much misery and bloodshed. For many days the fleet lay motionless, its way blocked by the Landscheiding. At last the great dyke was taken, and a path for the rising waters was broken through it; but many obstacles and much hard fighting still lay between Boisot and starving Leyden. Both Spaniards and Netherlanders professed Christianity, but its great law of mercy and forgiveness was little understood; they fought more like wild beasts than civilised men. In the fierce hand-to-hand contests on the crumbling dykes, barbarous cruelties were perpetrated by both sides alike, and quarter was neither asked nor given. For Anita, who was bound to the one country by ties of blood, and to the other by those of gratitude, the struggle (so dreadful in itself) had a peculiar horror. She could not wish success to the Spaniards, though they belonged to her motherland, for their victory would mean death to the heroic citizens, and worse than death for herself; yet they were still her countrymen, speaking the language that she had heard from infancy, and she could not bear to see them ruthlessly slaughtered by her protectors. Bertrand did what he might to shield her from all sights and sounds of horror, but his power was small. His duty to his

country led him into scenes which he would gladly have spared her, but it had been found impossible to make other arrangements for her safety, and she was still under his care.

The Spanish forces far outnumbered the relieving army, and there was always the terrible possibility of defeat. Anita had much cause for anxiety on her own account, for should the Dutch be defeated her fate and Isabella's would be decided. She knew that should they fall into the hands of the Spaniards, no torture or humiliation could be devised which would satisfy the cruelty of their persecutors. The bitterest agony, the most painful death, would be still too good for heretics and renegades.

But now, should it be her lot to suffer martyrdom for the faith of the Reformers, she would not die in ignorance of its principles and hopes. She had learnt much of the grand truths for which her father had died. She was beginning to love and trust the Saviour who was leading her, in His own time and way, out of darkness into His glorious light.

## CHAPTER IX.

“ Lest, when our latest hope is fled, ye taste of our despair,  
And learn by proof, in some wild hour, how much the wretched  
dare.”



IT was a fine warm day, late in September ; the bright sun shone pitilessly down upon the misery in Leyden.

A crowd pressed round the burgomaster in the market-place. They were noisy, angry, almost riotous. But upon the steps of the council-house,

above the surging, maddened, threatening mob, stood Van der Werf, speaking in calm and commanding tones. "Be men!" he cried; "death by starvation is better than death at Spanish hands! While I have life, the gates shall not be opened! Take heart: hope still! Boisot will come at last!"

A murmur passed from mouth to mouth; the haggard faces scowled ominously; the hungry eyes grew fiercer; a man sprang upon an empty waggon and stood facing the tall, gaunt figure of the burgomaster. "Boisot will *not* come. Go up to the tower, look out and see what hope is ours! He cannot reach us, and we will not tamely starve because, forsooth, Meinheer Van der Werf commands it. Have we not done enough? Think of your wives, your children, men of Leyden! have mercy on them and open—*open the gates to Valdez*. It is our only hope. At worst, no harder thing can come upon us now!"

Some among the listeners cried loudly, "We will open the gates. Van der Werf shall not prevent us. We have borne and suffered enough. The Prince of Orange has mocked us and left us to our fate!" and they turned, shouting, "To the gates, to the walls! Valdez shall come in!"

But the clear voice of their noble burgomaster rang through the square, commanding silence. "Stop! listen, men! Think you that there is *no* harder thing than death by starvation? Will you welcome the

Spaniard to your homes ? Will you trust your wives and children to his mercy sooner than die bravely, as you have lived ? Will you stoop to sue for compassion from the men whom you have so long defied ? Are you willing to submit at last to the indignities, the insults, the tortures of the insolent soldiers who could not conquer you ? Think you that Valdez will have mercy ? or Alva ? or Philip ? Do you trust *them*, who are steeped in blood and black with treachery and falsehood ? *I* tell you, men of Leyden, that all the agony, all the misery, which our city has suffered hitherto, will be nothing to what she shall endure in the hour of Valdez' triumph. Let us not so dishonour ourselves ; let us be men ; let us show them that *nothing* can bring us to their feet ! Let us wait ! Boisot will come ; or if not, we will sell our lives dearly ; we will be avenged upon our enemies ! ”

There was a moment's silence, then Albrecht van Hessfeldt spoke. “ Meinheer Van der Werf has said well. Let us live for vengeance ! The powers of Heaven have promised that at least. When the last hour comes, we will ourselves slay the women and the children and set fire to the city ; then it shall go hard with us if our enemies do not feel the bitterness of our revenge.”

Once more there was a stir among the crowd. Albrecht's wild words found an echo in their hearts, for he spoke like one inspired. He believed himself

to know their destined fate, and he *promised* them “vengeance” with half-prophetic authority. But he was interrupted ; a messenger came with haste to beg their help at the eastern gate, and the men who had so lately cried out to their leaders to submit, now did good and valiant service against the Spaniards. Once more they were beaten off, and once more the brave burghers of Leyden resolved “to conquer or to die” ; yet for many days their patience was unrewarded.

The sun shone down on leafless trees, and on streets and gardens brown and bare as in the depth of winter, for every green and living thing had been devoured by the starving people ; but the counsel of the heroic burgomaster prevailed, and Leyden still flung defiance at her foes, while the water slowly rose and Boisot’s fleet came nearer.

Deliverance seemed to be at hand, but their hopes were again dashed to the ground. All William’s resource and energy ; all the constancy and courage of the citizens ; all they had done and suffered, was unavailing, for the Almighty Himself seemed to be against them.

Marie had grown weak and listless ; she rarely left the house. She fancied that the death she prayed for was coming fast, and she was thankful. She had no means of helping the sufferers, and she could not bear to see their agony, so she lived chiefly in the seclusion of her own rooms, and saw none but Albrecht. One

day he entered hastily. "Marie ! Marie !" he cried, in despair, "we are forsaken of God, man can do nothing. Oh ! that we were dead ; that we had reached rest and peace in the grave ! Can it be that God is fighting against us, or is it that things happen but by chance ? Is there no God at all ?"

Marie did not answer. *Was* it all by chance ?

"We are lost, Marie ! The water is *going down*!"

"Going down ?" she almost shrieked.

"Yes ! every hour. The wind is blowing from the east and is driving it back to the sea ! The God in whom we trusted——"

"Hush, Albrecht !" said Marie (the words rose unbidden in her mind). "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him ! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?"

"Oh, Marie ! I thought so once. I trusted ; I prayed : where was the answer ?"

"It may come yet," she replied in the same dreamy way.

"It will not come now. Hope no more. Strive only for resignation."

"The wind may change again," she said.

But the wind blew steadily from the east, and the waters sank far more rapidly than they had risen. Even Van der Werf, the bravest of all the brave people of Leyden, began to despair. For three days the wind blew and the waters fell ; then came a change.

The wind suddenly shifted to the north-west, the waves were driven furiously before the storm, the water deepened ; then the wind changed once more, but only to blow still harder from the south-west, and at midnight, on the second of October, Boisot's fleet swept across the ruined dykes in full course towards the starving city.

Forty-eight hours ago Leyden was despairing, and her enemies exulting in the near prospect of her fall. Now Valdez and his army will need stout hands and stouter hearts or she will be saved in spite of them. They will need all their well-tried skill, all their vaunted courage, for their foes are not alone of flesh and blood—the creeping, treacherous sea is against them, too !

Night fell over the city, dark with storm and wind, but through the blackness glimmered the flames of the burning villages, with which Boisot lighted his way across the dark waters.

Night fell, a blacker night than usual ; but the inhabitants of Leyden took no rest. The wind howled and roared about the city, and though help was nearer than it had ever been before, a horror of great darkness seemed over all.

It was not Albrecht's turn to watch upon the wall that night. He sat at home, silent and brooding. At last he spoke. “ I cannot think, Marie, that we shall even now be saved.”

“ Our friends are very near, Albrecht.”

“ Our foes are nearer. The best I can hope is that Boisot and we together may taste revenge. I think we shall ; and after that our time will have come to die.”

“ Oh, Albrecht ! why will you try to take away my hope, my faith in God ? ”

“ I have no wish, God knows, to take away any hope or comfort that you can rest upon ; but, Marie, to-morrow will bring the end. We can die more easily than we have lived. Is it so sad a thing to change *this life* for Heaven’s glories, Heaven’s peace and purity and quiet ? ”

“ Then you still believe, in spite of all ? ” she said.

“ I do believe that for such as you and Hélène there is a heaven ; I was mad to doubt the existence of God. You know that in happier times, when I could think calmly, I never doubted that we have a Ruler and an Avenger stronger than man. If all had been by chance we must long ago have submitted to the tyranny of Spain ; but, Marie, quiet, peace, and purity are not for men like me, neither in Heaven nor earth. I am a bloodstained, sinful man——”

“ But, Albrecht, the war is right and just ; it is for God’s holy religion.”

“ Marie, I fight, not for God’s laws, not for truth or justice ; I fight because I hate the Spaniards, because I would be avenged upon them. You cannot under-

stand my feelings. You do not know what it is to strike with a pleasure in the pain and the woe that is suffered by the enemy. You are not like me. When we part at the end of this life, we shall never meet again. *You* will be happy, *you* will forget all wrong and misery in the light of Heaven, while I—ah ! Marie, who can tell ? I only know that I shall not be with you, and I fear that our parting will come very soon, —perhaps to-morrow ! My darling ! My darling ! ”

Marie looked up with startled, sorrowing eyes. Was this Albrecht, whose faith had been so strong, whose life had been so pure ? Had he, indeed, reason to fear what lay beyond the grave ? His dark face was sadder, but gentler, than usual. “ Albrecht,” she sobbed, scarce knowing what she said, “ I will never leave you. Nothing on earth, nothing in Heaven can part us ! ”

“ You do not think what you are saying, Marie. How can you tell what lies before us ? ”

As he spoke, a fearful crash sounded above the raging of the storm, long, loud, and awful. The house trembled at the shock, the very town seemed falling ; then, for one moment, there was silence—the elements themselves were hushed.

Suddenly the air was rent with wild cries of terror ; shriek after shriek rose up to the troubled sky. There was a rush of hurried feet, a trampling of armed men, and, above all, a cry that struck terror to the

stoutest hearts in Leyden: “The Spaniards! the Spaniards!”

Marie swooned in her husband’s arms, and Albrecht, with one kiss on her pale cheek, and one prayer for forgiveness, drew forth his dagger, and raised his hand to strike the blow which was to set her free for ever from danger, sorrow, and inhumanity. He loved her, therefore he would not spare her. He loved her, and she should go to Heaven without opening her eyes again to this cruel, cruel world!

Again the cry rang through the air: “The Spaniards! the Spaniards!” The hurrying footsteps, the trampling came surging up the street. Now! now! if ever, for his work of cruel mercy; the time to strike had come!

## CHAPTER X.

"Sleep till the end, true soul and sweet."



WE must now return to Anita and Isabella, whom we left under the safe and kind guardianship of Bertrand van Hessfeldt on board the *Star of Hope*. At this time they had lived in the strange little flat-bottomed

vessel for rather more than a week, and were beginning to feel at home there. Anita was thankful to be a welcome guest after her long residence in her uncle's house, where her maintenance was looked upon as a burden. There was not one of the rough crew but treated her with respect and consideration. Spanish as she was, her sweet voice and lovely face charmed

them all ; they made so fair a contrast with their own harsh tones and rugged features ; and none felt the charm of her presence more deeply than the young captain. To him she had come, like a gleam of heavenly sunshine, to break the darkness of his life ; and he needed it, for sometimes he feared that their errand was hopeless, and utterly despaired of the safety of Albrecht and his wife. Till Anita came, they had been all in all to him. He loved his brother with a passionate devotion that was due partly to his own ardent nature and partly to his admiration for Albrecht's character. He thought him heroic and self-sacrificing, truthful and gentle, as the knight "without fear and without reproach." Other people might not agree with him, but he knew Albrecht better than any one else, and his estimate was most likely to be the correct one—thus he argued, and thus he looked up to his brother, and lavished on him the hero-worship, which, after all, might have been bestowed on a less worthy object.

Till Anita came, the one desire of his life had been to reach Leyden quickly. He had wished only to be allowed to rescue Albrecht and Marie ; but now there were times when the miseries of the starving city passed out of his mind, when he forgot everything but Anita del Rio. For her sake he was not now *always* in the forefront of the battle. Before his prisoners came on board he had dared the worst that the Spaniards

could do ; his spirits had risen and his heart had grown lighter in the heat of the most desperate encounter. Now, he dreaded the engagements, which, as a soldier, he had no right to shun, for if his vessel should be boarded and taken, Anita would be again exposed to the awful dangers of the Inquisition.

One day Count van Sittart rather sarcastically commended his new-found caution, and praised his admirable consideration towards his prisoners.

Bertrand's brown cheeks reddened. "I hope, sir," he said angrily, "that you do not think I have failed in my duty ? I only obeyed your own orders in keeping with the rest of the fleet."

"Did I say that you had done wrong ?" replied his old friend, with a quiet smile. "I merely expressed my pleasure at the restraint you put upon the natural impetuosity of your temper. You do well to remember the presence of your prisoners."

"*Your* prisoners, sir. *I* do not hold them guilty for a moment."

"Well ! well ! it will be soon enough to decide that question when we reach Leyden."

Bertrand left him hastily and returned to his own boat, where he found Anita leaning on the side, looking at the long tracks of red and gold that the setting sun had thrown across the water. The ships lay motionless on the scarcely rippling tide, as they had lain for many an hour ; and, in the far distance,

hovered a smaller fleet of Spanish vessels, watching them with eagerness, but not yet caring to risk a battle. They hoped that time would conquer for them. Several large dykes still blocked the way to Leyden ; and these were in Spanish keeping.

“Have you been to see Count van Sittart ?” Anita asked, as he joined her.

“Yes. He sent for me. I should not have gone unless he had.”

“Why not ?” she asked. “I rather like him.”

“Do you ?” he said in astonishment. “He was very rude and disagreeable to you, I thought.”

“I suppose it was his duty,” she said, smiling; “but it might have been hard for us if you had not been so near at hand.”

“Do you know, Anita, that he still calls you ‘a prisoner’ ?” asked Bertrand, astonished that she should regard the danger of Count van Sittart’s severity as past.

“Yes, I know ; but if I were not a prisoner here, I should now be in the dungeons of the Inquisition. I could hardly have escaped alone, if he had set me free. It is better as it is.”

“But suppose you—*we*—should not be able to prove your innocence at last ?”

It was hardly kind of Bertrand to suggest such unpleasant possibilities, but Anita took them with greater calmness than himself.

“I am not afraid of that,” she said. “I have only said what was true. If we get to Leyden safely, my difficulties will be over, I hope.”

“I hope so. I know that Albrecht will do all he can for you. No! there cannot really be any danger if we can but reach the city.”

“Do you think that we shall not?”

“I cannot tell. As soon as it is dark we are to make an attack on the dyke: if we take it, the worst will be over, and I hope we shall reach Leyden in time; but sometimes I think that Albrecht was right—that we are fated to be conquered at last.”

On that night they completely routed the defenders of the dyke; and then all on board the fleet turned out to assist at the difficult task of levelling it. The work was quickly done, and the fleet was again under way. Alas! its progress soon received another check. As I have already said, the wind changed suddenly to the east; and under its influence the water fell so rapidly that, in the course of a few hours, the ships were aground, and the utmost efforts of their crews could not force them onward.

“What has happened?” asked Anita.

Bertrand explained, saying passionately, “I cannot bear to think of Marie and Albrecht and poor little Hélène in Leyden now! They must be dying of starvation.”

“God help them,” said Anita gravely.

"I sometimes think that it seems as if He will not help us," replied Bertrand. "Can it be that the monks are right; that He is displeased with us and our religion? It seems like it. Why did He allow us to be defeated at Mookerheyde? Why does He permit such miseries?"

"I cannot tell. It is hard to understand," said Anita sadly. "Is it that He allows the Evil One to govern *this world* as he wills? Do you remember what Señor Boerhaave read last Sunday, how God delivered the patriarch Job into Satan's hands, to tempt and try as it pleased him?"

"It may be so," said Bertrand slowly—thinking of the strange sights at Utrecht—"but it is not a pleasant idea. I would rather believe that we are in the hands of God Himself. Satan, if he were allowed, might tempt and torture us for his pleasure without our gaining anything. The preachers teach that sorrow and misery are sent by God to help us (it is hard to see how) on our road to Heaven; but sometimes it does seem as if we were under the governance of hell."

He told her then of the battle fought in the sky above the city of Utrecht; how he and Albrecht had witnessed it; how its various interpretations had all assisted to depress his unhappy countrymen in their struggle for freedom; and how he himself had, for a time, lost all hope of victory, because it seemed to

point to the final overthrow of the Dutch. But the strangest part of his story was yet to come.

“Then do you not still dread that your enemies may be victorious?” asked his companion.

“No,” he said. “The prophecy has been fulfilled. That battle in the clouds represented almost exactly, and in every detail, the Battle of Mookerheyde, in which Count Louis of Nassau was slain. The overthrow of our forces was complete. Two or three of my followers and I myself are almost the only survivors of our army. Since then I have not feared that Philip will have power to oppress us much longer, and to force his religion, his tyranny, and, worse than all, his own choice of rulers upon us, for ever.” Bertrand spoke passionately, forgetful for the time that his auditor belonged to the hated race of Spain. “Foolish and contemptible as Philip is, he cannot really believe that we, the free sons of Holland, will submit to be governed by foreigners at his command; and by such foreigners, murderous, lying——”

“Señor van Hessfeldt,” interrupted Anita, “I ask you to believe that there are Spaniards who neither lie nor murder.”

“I beg your pardon. I forgot myself. I know it well. I, of all men, was wrong to speak so strongly. Forgive my rudeness, if you can; I am truly sorry for it”; and so indeed he looked.

“I am sure that you have seen the worst of us here

in the Netherlands. Spaniards can be generous, noble, and unselfish. *You* cannot regret their cruelties more deeply than I do. Nay, not so much, for they are my countrymen. I wish you had known my father ; you would have thought better of my people then."

"Anita, can you not forgive me ? I honour the memory of your father, as I honour that of my own. And I——" What he would have said is uncertain, for he was suddenly called away to attend a council on board the admiral's ship, the *Ark of Delft*.

The east wind blew steadily for three days. Every hour the men grew more weary of their forced inactivity, and their leaders more hopeless of saving the city. Some of the more impatient talked of throwing up the enterprise, and leaving the unfortunate town to its fate, but the majority were for persisting at all hazards. Yet they could do nothing until the wind changed.

When the wished-for change came it was no gentle breeze, but a strong resistless gale, driving the crested waves far inland across the ruined dykes. The north-west wind passed on, telling as it went of dishonour and defeat to the Spaniards, and of victory to their enemies. It was scarcely gone when there came a still heavier storm from the south-west to finish the yet uncompleted work. All day the waters fled before the gale, until at midnight they had reached the walls of Leyden and had made a path for her deliverers.

Boisot wasted no time, but as soon as the water was deep enough to float his vessels, set forth again to the rescue. He did not wait for daylight ; but in storm and darkness his ships swept across the surging waves, regardless of the raging elements and equally regardless of the fierce attacks of the Spanish vessels.

That battle on the black seething waters, among trees and houses more than half submerged, was weird and unearthly beyond expression ; the combatants fought in total darkness or were lighted by blazing wrecks and buildings. The roar of the cannon, the splashing of the oars and paddle-wheels, the hoarse shouts of the Zealanders, the war-cries of the Spaniards, the shrieks, groans, and curses of the wounded or drowning, mingled hideously in wild confusion. The conflict raged fiercely, now upon the crumbling dykes, now in the eddying waters, and then everywhere at once ; but Boisot's fleet made way.

The firing from the Spanish vessels slackened, and the Dutch swept on, only to be checked by a large farmhouse with many outbuildings that lay directly in their course. The darkness had prevented the Netherlanders from discovering this formidable obstacle until the foremost of their ships struck against a low shed already under water. At that moment their enemies opened a heavy fire upon them from their places of concealment in and about the buildings.

The suddenness of this encounter threw the Netherlanders into confusion, and for a time it seemed likely to go hard with them. They could not see their enemies, but they were easily distinguished by those above, while, in the uncertain light, it was no easy matter to steer clear of the low-lying mass of buildings among which they were entangled.

But fortune favoured them. One of the Spanish vessels, which had been smouldering for some time, broke out brightly into a flame, casting a lurid glare over the scene, and showing the Netherlanders their true position.

It was difficult to force a passage even now. The doors of the house were barred and barricaded, and the attacking party was exposed to a merciless fire from above. Van Hessfeldt received orders to drive out the Spaniards from a cottage to the left of the larger building, which commanded a narrow space between the two houses through which the Dutch were obliged to pass.

For some minutes his attempts to break down the temporary defences of the enemy were unavailing. At last the cottage door gave way, disclosing to view a narrow flight of stairs leading to the upper rooms, upon which stood or sat at least a dozen men with loaded muskets in their hands. At the stair head stood the tall dark figure of their captain.

Bertrand saw that there was no time to lose, so

crying, “Follow me, my men ! Down with all tyrants !” he led the way through the few feet of water that lay, waist-deep, between him and the staircase.

The Spaniards hesitated one moment, and in that moment lost the advantage which their position had given them. Bertrand and the “sea beggars” were upon them—too close for them to use firearms with effect, crowded together as they were. A fierce hand-to-hand encounter followed. The man upon the lowest step was dragged down by many hands to the water below ; but the sharp steel of a Zealander put an end to his life almost before he reached it. Again and again the Dutch were beaten back, but at last they got a foothold on the stairs. Step by step they mounted higher, forcing the Spaniards slowly to the top, where their young captain still stood, giving his orders in a clear, ringing tone that was distinctly heard above the tumult. Letting his men pass him, he covered their retreat (which yet was not a flight) until they were forced into a small room at the top of the stairs.

Then followed a fearful struggle, but in the end the Spaniards were vanquished. Many were slain. The rest gathered round their chief by the small window, doing their best to defend themselves against the overwhelming numbers of their assailants.

Suddenly the Spanish captain gave some quick commands ; the man nearest the window jumped through

it into the water below. His companions followed, but before the captain could make his escape the Netherlanders had recovered from their surprise. He was almost overpowered, his dress was torn, his face cut and bleeding, and the golden rosary which he wore conspicuously round his neck was nearly taken from him several times, in spite of his evident anxiety to defend it. One of his enemies seemed especially anxious to possess himself of it, and made several most determined attempts to cut him down; but the Zealander tripped over the body of a Spaniard and fell headlong as he was rushing furiously at the captain, who in the confusion made his way through the window after his men. Bertrand only arrived upon the scene in time to witness his escape, for he had been occupied in another part of the building until then. For a moment he stood at the window watching the Castilian with an interest that surprised himself. Perhaps it was the handsome face and graceful figure of his enemy that had awakened his interest, or it may have been his calm, cool courage in an undoubtedly trying position, or possibly it was his care for the safety of his men, while regarding his own so little. Whatever the reason might be, Bertrand watched him, though his enemy, with not unfriendly attention. But there were others watching too!

As his head rose above the surface of the water, an old man, standing beside Bertrand at the window,

raised his musket and took a long and careful aim ; but to his surprise Van Hessfeldt struck up his piece, sharply commanding him not to fire without orders. The man grumbled, but obeyed, and the Spaniard reached the dyke in safety. He gained a foothold on it ; but as he did so he was stabbed to the heart, and fell mortally wounded. The glitter of the chain about his neck caught the eye of his rapacious foe, who stooped to snatch it from him, but the dying man struggled eagerly for the possession of it. A moment later, Bertrand heard a splash, and the body of the Spaniard was washed past the window.

So died Alonzo da Sessa, the last of his race, fighting bravely in a war that he hated.

Bertrand returned to his ship, now that the work was done ; and in a few minutes the whole fleet was clear of the obstructing buildings and was again on the way to Leyden.

Van Hessfeldt had received only a slight wound in his left arm, but many of his men were seriously injured. Anita had been watching the battle with a white face, that grew still whiter as the bleeding and disabled men were brought on board ; but, among the many lessons she had learnt during the vicissitudes of her life, was that most difficult one of self-control ; and her lips did not tremble, her hands did not shake, as she helped Isabella to bind up the wounds, that looked so ghastly in the torchlight.

She dressed the ugly sword-cut that Bertrand had received last of all, for he would have his men attended to first. "I can wait better than they," he said. "This is only a scratch compared to theirs, poor fellows!"

"Only a scratch!" she repeated.

"Yes; it is less than I thought at first. You seem to have charmed the pain away."

"Then go and rest, and give my charm a chance," she answered.

He shook his head. "There is more work before us. Have *you* been safe, Anita, while I was away?"

"Yes," she returned; "but it is terrible!"

"It is terrible to men like me, who have been in the midst of fighting since childhood. I wish with all my heart that I could spare you this; but even for you I cannot neglect my duty. I must go where I am ordered."

"You must not think of me. I do not fear," she said.

"But I cannot forget you; and I fear that harm may happen you. For Heaven's sake, keep out of sight; do not expose yourself to danger!"

"I will not unless there is work for me to do."

"Even then, be careful—for my sake, if not for your own. To lose you would be worse than death, Anita. I—"

He did not finish his sentence. It was an ill-omened

time and place to speak of *love*, yet the words had all but risen to his lips.

Through all the terrible scenes of that awful night, her face was constantly before his eyes, her voice in his ears. He knew that at any moment she might be snatched away from him for ever, yet he could not stay beside her to protect her from the evils that threatened her. At any cost his duty to his country must be done.

Anita guessed what he would have said, and was not displeased to think that Bertrand loved her. But her thoughts were soon turned from herself to the conflict, which was again raging with the greatest violence. The fight was long and obstinate, but ended in the defeat of the Spaniards ; many of their ships were wrecked or disabled, and the rest did not venture to continue the struggle.

Boisot's fleet bore proudly on, ever nearing its destination, while the clouds passed away, and the morning rose in blushing splendour, clothing the earth, the sky, and the still tossing water with heaven-born beauty.

Anita was watching the sunrise when Bertrand joined her. "Surely," she said, "this is a good omen for us."

"I hope so," he said slowly, "but the fortresses of Zoetwoerde and Lammen still lie between us and the city. They are stronger than we thought ; and it is

possible—nay, probable—that even now we may be unable to save Leyden. Yet I cannot think that we have been brought so far for nothing,” he added more cheerfully.

“ Must we pass those forts to reach Leyden ? ”

“ Yes ; unless the water rises high enough to allow us to go round them ; and in the meantime our friends are dying. It is horrible to—— But stay, what are they doing now ? ” he exclaimed suddenly, with his eyes fixed on the nearest fort. “ Surely they must intend to attack us. They cannot mean to abandon the place, though that crowd on the dyke looks wonderfully like it. They are trying to escape us, fools, cowards ! They could hold the place till doomsday, if they had the courage of children,” he continued scornfully. “ Look at them, pouring out of the fort as if it were in flames—as it shall be before another hour has gone.”

Then Van Hessfeldt turned to his men, commanding them to row as if their lives depended on every stroke. “ We shall overtake them yet ! ” he cried ; “ we will teach them to travel more quickly still. What, my men, can you go no faster ? Remember our friends in Leyden. Think of the Inquisition. Faster, faster, faster ! They will escape us yet.”

He was more excited than Anita had ever seen him before. She spoke to him, but he did not hear her ; she touched his arm, “ Bertrand,” she

said, “for my father’s sake, for *mine*, have mercy on them.”

His desire for vengeance was strong and bitter, and he made no answer.

“ For Christ’s sake, spare them. For His sake, who died for them as well as for you.”

She said no more ; but, after a moment’s struggle with himself, he answered gravely, “ I will try; but it will be harder than you know. Our men are not more merciful than they.”

We will not attempt to describe the dreadful scene that followed. Bertrand, for Anita’s sake, did his utmost to protect any of the unfortunate Spaniards who begged for mercy; but, as may easily be imagined, he could do little to control the Zealanders, “ who neither gave nor took quarter.” Many were overtaken and slain, and the fortress was set on fire.

Nothing further was accomplished that day. Boisot commanded his vessels to remain out of range of the enemies’ gunshot, excepting one or two small boats, which he employed to reconnoitre the still almost impregnable position of the besiegers.

He sent messengers to Van der Werf, suggesting that, early on the following morning, the citizens and the fleet should make a joint attack upon the fortress. To this plan the Burgomaster agreed, although it seemed almost desperate, for it was their only hope.

The night fell darkly over Leyden, but brought

little rest to any of the combatants, for each party feared an attack under cover of the darkness. Scarcely half the hours of watching had gone by when those on board the fleet, as well as those within the city, heard a sound like muttering thunder ; and no sooner had it died away than a long procession of lights was seen crossing the water ; but with what object the darkness made it impossible to discover.

What could it all mean ? Was it that their journey was fruitless, their prayers disregarded, their struggles in vain ? Was Leyden already in the hands of her ruthless foes ? Were her brave children already being butchered in her streets ?

It might be so, and the faces of veteran soldiers turned pale at the terrible thought. The black, howling night gave no answer to their questions, no comfort in their doubts and fears ; but with the morning, the joyous, glorious morning, there came strange tidings of hope for Leyden. The fleet might enter freely now, for the great fortress was empty.

In the night the Spaniards had stolen away from the place they might have held for months. They might even then have rendered Boisot's journey fruitless ; they might have frustrated all William's plans ; they might have crushed the pride of the defiant citizens of Leyden. But they had fled from the stronghold, in wild terror and dismay, leaving it an easy prey to Boisot's army. Where now was their vaunted

courage? They had fled, without striking a single blow. They had fled when they might have conquered with scarcely a struggle, for the sound that had startled them and their foes alike had been caused by the falling of a long portion of the city wall, immediately opposite to Lammen.

## CHAPTER XI.

“Be vengeance wholly left to Powers Divine.”



THE fortress was empty. Slowly the long procession of boats passed under its frowning walls. The city gates were opened. The city bells were ringing. Crowding the quays and streets of Leyden were its hungry, waiting, joyous people. Night had gone, the morning sun shone warmly on the scene ; and, through the gaping breach in their defences, the happy citizens streamed forth to meet their deliverers.

They had done and suffered much ; they had borne misery and privation without flinching ; now was their hour of triumph. They had held the town for William and for Holland. They dared the wrath of Philip—the fate of Harlem. They had been noble and resolute in their long trial, and the time of their reward had come. They were unconquered still ; they had won a victory for Holland ; they had proved the strength of patience, and the power of a rightful cause. They had prayed and fought and waited, and the God of Heaven had judged between them and their enemies. His verdict was given at last. He had spoken by wind and wave, by the terror which had fallen on their foes. He had stooped to vindicate their truth and righteousness, condescending to save them by His own direct interposition. He, in whose keeping are the winds of Heaven and the hearts of men, had sent the storm to their deliverance and had smitten the veteran soldiers of Spain with miserable cowardice, so answering His people's prayers and showing, once again, that He will not suffer the final triumph of evil.

Towards the city, with its laughing, weeping, sorrowing, rejoicing crowds, the armament made way over the sunlit, dancing waters, but every boat as it swept by passed under the shadow of the grey fort of Lammen. Thank Heaven ! it was harmless now ! The Lord had conquered for them. Under the very shadow of that stern and frowning pile they dared to

pass ; but every soldier in the fleet was thankful that they had not needed to force their way into the starving city against its guns. There was not one but doubted whether they could have passed the tower at all ; it seemed as if destruction would have overtaken them inevitably had they tried to storm it. Now, close beside its massive walls, they saw the danger from which they had been saved ; and they wondered at the courage that had supported Leyden. How had she dared to look for help, and to wait for it through her weeks of misery, knowing that between herself and her friends lay Lammens, and the long lines of Spanish troops ? Yet she had done well to wait.

Through the canals of the city the boats passed in among the hungry crowds. So thin, so wan, and so like dying men were they, that even the wild "sea beggars" were moved to pity. They, who could calmly and unconcernedly look on death in battle, nay, on the cold-blooded torture of a helpless foe, cared for the starving people patiently and tenderly. They carried bread from house to house ; they fed tiny children with a gentleness that such harsh natures rarely show ; and they tended the old, the helpless, and the maimed with untiring zeal. Rough, cruel, hard-hearted as they were, the Zealanders on that day showed themselves in a new light, and many a soul in Leyden called down blessings on their heads.

Once again music sounded in the streets, bands

played gaily, and overhead the riotous merriment of the bells added to the joyous confusion. Deliverance had come. Leyden again kept holiday, as she had kept it two months before in hope (only in hope) of this glorious ending to her woes. Now it had come ! The town was full of friendly faces ; and there was bread enough and to spare. Enough and to spare ! No longer were her people doomed to the slow misery of starvation. They had eaten and were satisfied ; they had feasted in the streets, on the bread for which they had been dying ! They lived unconquered still.

Many a song of praise, many a thankful prayer, rose that day from the churches and the homes of Leyden. The great cathedral was filled to overflowing with the people and their deliverers. From many hundred voices rose up the grand "Te Deum," but the strain was hushed ere it reached its end. There are joys too deep for words, and this was one. The relief from pain and fear was unutterable. Even to God Himself their thanks could not be spoken. The glorious psalm of praise begun on their lips was finished only in their hearts. Some silent, some weeping, they left the church. Old and young, noble ladies and fierce Zealanders, burgomaster and admiral, passed out into the streets together, where the wild delirium of joy still reigned supreme. Singing, dancing, laughing groups of men and women thronged the thoroughfares and

gathered in the market-place. And the bright sun shone, the fresh winds blew, and light and warmth were everywhere.

Yet, now and then, a shadow fell over the mirth of the people, as with slow step and bowed head a grey-bearded man or a black-robed woman passed among them. For many a mourner Boisot had come too late ; their nearest and dearest lay cold in death ; and though overhead the bells still rang out their wild melodies of triumph, they sounded in those ears like a dirge.

Bertrand was not present in the cathedral ; for, not seeing his brother and sister among the crowd, he had hastened anxiously to their house to learn their fate. As he turned the corner of the street his heart sank, so silent and deserted the place appeared. Heavy shutters still darkened the windows of Albrecht's house, but the door was open. He entered trembling, and stood for a moment in the dismal hall, listening in agonising suspense for one sound of life.

As he stood there in the silence he felt his courage ebbing away as it had never ebbed on the battle-field. *What* lay beyond those dark oak doors ? The hall began to swim round him, and his heart seemed to stop beating ; unconsciously he uttered aloud an incoherent prayer for strength and mercy.

A hand lightly touched his arm, and Anita's voice said gently, " Let me go, Bertrand."

The touch of her living hand, the sound of her voice in that death-like house, seemed to revive him. "No, no," he replied, "you would not know them. I must go myself."

So saying, he opened softly, one after another, the doors of all the rooms on the ground floor, but they were not there. With increasing fear he mounted the broad stairs, and, entering one of the bedrooms, started back with a cry that brought Anita to his side. There, stretched on the bed, was Albrecht, white and motionless; and beside him, clinging to one cold hand with both her own, sat Marie. She turned her head at the sound of the opening door, but her wide-open blue eyes showed no trace of recognition, and her face was so pallid and ghastly that Bertrand fancied it was her spirit returned from the dead to watch over the corpse of her husband. He did not doubt for an instant that Albrecht was dead; and sinking into a chair he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed aloud, forgetful of everything but the bitter thought that they had come too late.

Anita passed him, and opening her little basket took out of it such food and stimulants as she had thought might prove useful. Marie at first refused to eat, but soon she submitted to being fed like a child. Anita gave her as much as she thought safe, and then turned to examine Albrecht.

"Bertrand!" she exclaimed, in a low but excited

tone, "come here. I think your brother is still living; perhaps we may save him yet. I wish Isabella was here; she would know what to do."

"You are my good angel, Anita. Fool that I am, I should have let them die without help," he said, as he came towards the bed. "What must I do?"

More than an hour passed before their efforts were rewarded with the least sign of returning animation, but at length, just as Bertrand was beginning to despair, an unmistakable improvement became visible. Yet it was a long time before their patient was out of danger. The terrible excitement and strain to which he had been subjected, added to the want of proper food, had brought on a fever; and he lay for weeks in alternate delirium and unconsciousness, which threatened to baffle the skill of the best physicians of Leyden. Marie was also very ill for some days; but good food and careful nursing soon so far restored her to health that she was anxious to take her place at her husband's bedside. Anita, who had installed herself as head nurse, would not permit her to do more than visit his room two or three times a day. She and Isabella divided the watching between them, for the servants of the household were themselves so much weakened by the terrible privations through which they had passed that they were in no condition to undergo the fatigues of nursing.

The faithful and untiring care of his two attendants

saved Seigneur van Hessfeldt's life, but there came a time, in the earlier stages of his convalescence, when the faces and accents of his Spanish nurses disturbed and excited him so much that Marie was obliged to take the duties of the sick-room on herself.

It was on this day that Bertrand found Anita in Marie's sitting-room, and said to her, laughingly, "I am glad that you are taking a holiday, nurse. I have been telling Albrecht he will wear you out."

Anita tried to answer lightly, but her lips trembled and she could not speak.

Bertrand came a step or two nearer, and said gently, "Is anything troubling you, Anita?"

She hesitated. "It is only that—your people—your brother cannot bear to have us near him, because we are Spanish. I have been thinking that Isabella and I had better go to England, or somewhere, where people will not hate us—"

"Hate you, Anita; don't you know that we all love you? You must be mistaken; Albrecht never could have meant that. If he did he would be the most ungrateful wretch alive. Why, you saved his life, and Marie's too, I believe."

Anita did not answer, and he went on, "If you go away, Anita, I will go too. I said just now, 'we love you,' but I want to tell you that I love you; I have loved you ever since I first saw you on the *Avenger*. Won't you stay with us, and take my people for your

people? Your own have cast you off, so you owe nothing to them."

Anita had made up her mind long before how this question should be answered if it was ever asked ; but now, instead of giving a direct reply, she only said, "What would Albrecht say? I should be Spanish still."

"If I don't mind, Albrecht needn't," said Bertrand, rather brusquely.

"I am prouder of being Spanish than I should be of being even Dutch," said Anita, looking up at him with a smile, "but if you will take me on that understanding, I will be as good a Hollander as I can."

When Albrecht heard the story of his Spanish guest, and how she had nursed him back to life, great shame and loathing of his own ingratitude fell over him ; and he could not do enough to prove how warmly he would welcome his new sister. At his request the marriage was only delayed until he was strong enough to take part in the ceremony ; and, following so soon upon the siege, it was memorable for years in Leyden for the splendour of its celebration, and for the number of distinguished guests who witnessed it. William himself was present, and Count van Sittart gave away the bride.

And now, before the falling curtain hides those past

scenes from our view, we may perhaps catch a fleeting glimpse of later years. We see Leyden, more prosperous than ever before, honoured among all the cities of the province ; we see her university, founded as a memorial of her heroic resistance, gradually growing in fame and usefulness. We see the Dutch unflagging in their long struggle for freedom, though too soon bereft of their great leader ; we see them at last hang up the sword to enjoy the peace and liberty for which they have so nobly striven.

Looking closer, we see here and there a figure that we know. Foremost among them is our old friend, Count van Sittart. A few years longer he plays his part amidst scenes of strife and bloodshed, to perish at length vainly trying to protect the helpless townspeople in the massacre of Maestricht.

Vasco del Rio next claims our attention. Old as he is, through peace and war, he is still intent only on enriching himself. His efforts are not crowned with much success in Holland, and he obtains a recall in time to take command in the ill-fated Armada, thinking, perhaps, to have a share in the plunder of some wealthy English city ; but, battered by shot and shell, his vessel drifts a helpless wreck on the rocky coast of Scotland, and falls a prey to plunderers as merciless as himself. Struggling in the roaring water amongst jagged crags, which every moment threaten his feeble life, he gains the shore ; and lying exhausted there is

murdered by ruthless hands for the sake of his rich dress.

Alonzo's friend, Gonzalo, next crosses the stage with a fair and wealthy Flemish bride, whom he is taking to his ancestral home in Castile ; and there, in careless content, he lives and dies, while the great world surges round him unheeded in its trouble and its passion.

The next is a humbler figure than the gallant cavalier's—a little dark-eyed old woman with bowed form and trembling hands ; and as we look at her the roar of unceasing battle sounds less loudly in our ears. A quiet room with deep, narrow windows, through which the mellow sunlight falls on the soft, dark hair of little children, is before us now. The thin voice is telling eagerly a story that the small listeners know full well already, and yet their interest does not for one moment flag. “It is twelve years ago to-day,” she is saying, “since your lady mother and I left Don Vasco's house. It was a dark night and raining heavily——” and so she goes on telling once more the oft-told tale of their marvellous escape.

“Did Don Alonzo escape too ?” asks a bright-eyed boy earnestly.

“A long time passed before we knew,” says Isabella, “and then it was by a strange chance. Ask your mother, my dear, to tell you the story of the golden cross.”

“I know it,” is the boy's reply. “How she bought

it from a soldier because she knew it had been hers and Don Alonzo's, and how she heard from him that he was dead."

Just at this moment the door opens, and two ladies enter ; one tall and straight and dark, the other fairer and smaller. We should know them both, for neither of them have lost their old beauty, though the silver threads in Marie's hair, and the lines in her sweet face, tell of those dreadful months when Leyden was besieged and starving. Anita holds a little girl by the hand, as fair-haired, blue-eyed, and dainty as Marie herself ; and the children greet her enthusiastically, for their gentle cousin is a great favourite with all.

The ladies stay for a few moments to chat with Isabella, and to play with the little ones ; and then they close the door again and leave the old nurse and the children to their stories. Below, their husbands are waiting for them, talking together of old times. Bertrand is little altered, but a marked change has passed over Albrecht. He looks worn and aged for his years. Time, which so often mellows a noble character, has begun its good work early with him. Calm resolution has taken the place of the fierce pride and passion which once reigned in his soul, and his faith and courage support them all. He is a thankful, but will never be a happy man ; for sorrow and shame for the terrible sin which he so nearly committed have humbled him to the dust. He can never forget how he

failed in the time of trial, and how he well-nigh threw all away in the very hour of deliverance. Once, in an agony of remorse, he told Marie how, when he felt his consciousness failing on that dreadful night, he had tried to nerve himself to do the wicked deed, cursing his hand that it would not do his will ; but they have never since spoken of it, and even Bertrand does not know how near he was to being too late.

But this is no time for selfish melancholy. On the morrow they go to join the army once more ; the last evening at home must not be sad ; and when the children come down Albrecht forgets his sorrows in a romp with them. Tired at last with play, they gather lovingly about him, and for the moment he is happy, for the heart of the stern warrior is becoming more and more like that of a little child ; and their sweet trust in him seems an assurance that God has not set the dreadful mark of Cain upon his brow, as he sometimes fears.

He looks round lovingly on the pretty group beside him, while he holds his own little daughter close to his heart. His eyes travel from the children to the calm, sweet face of his wife, and then they wander to where Bertrand and Anita stand together by the window. The murmur of their voices reaches his ear, and now and then he catches a word of what they are saying. The war is especially bitter to Anita, for she cannot forget that her husband's foes are her own

countrymen, and there are times when she longs to hear again the dear language of her childhood ; but to-night she only remembers that Bertrand is going forth to battle and danger, and though she tries to be cheerful it is a hard task.

As Albrecht watches them, he thinks of his old hatred for all things Spanish, and of his wild thirst for vengeance. Within a day or two he will again be at his terrible task of fighting and slaughter ; it is a duty that cannot be laid aside. The safety of wives and children, the happiness of home, have been won at the sword's point, and still need the defence of the sword ; but listening to those murmuring voices, and to the ringing laughter of the little ones, he bows his head upon his hand and prays for peace as earnestly as in days gone by he was wont to pray for vengeance.

Thus let the curtain fall. We will look no more into those dark times, assured that even then God lighted the blackness of strife and sorrow with the sweet peace and love of home, teaching, as nothing else can teach, how tender and how loving is the Almighty Father to all His children.

THE END.

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